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IN THE STEPS OF THE BRONTËS



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IN THE STEPS OF THE BRONTËS

By

ERNEST RAYMOND



RICH AND COWAN
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To

my daughter

LELLA

Because of her love for Emily

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INTRODUCTORY

WHEN the publishers of the “In the Steps” series proposed to me that I should write a book about the Brontës, in time for the centenary of Emily Brontë’s death, I agreed with some enthusiasm because of my interest in that mysterious girl—does not her fugitive quality invite us all to track her into the mists?—and I set myself at once to read, or read again, all the manifold books of Brontë biography and interpretation. And I soon perceived, in some dismay, that with the exception of the earliest Lives, like Mrs. Gaskell’s *Charlotte Brontë* and Madame Duclaux’s *Emily Brontë*, their authors all began with an apology for having written the book at all. They all said or implied that it was unpardonable to write another book on the Brontës; and the only encouragement I could extract from this distressing situation was the fact that, none the less, they all did it. So, though shaken, I persisted in my resolve to do it too. But I feel it would be ill manners on my part, a want of neighbourliness and urbanity, if I were to stand aside from these good men and women and fail to state that it is unpardonable before committing the offence.

Of course I could find some excuses to suggest that in the present case it is less than completely wrong. And the first of these would be the plea that new books, careful and loving, should certainly be written about Emily and her sisters on the occasion of the centenary of her death. Another would affirm that the aching question of Emily Brontë will probably remain unallayed for ever, and therefore new voices will for ever be raised with their new interpretations of the riddle. For ever will Emily, that scholar gipsy of the moors, “fly our greetings, fly our speech and smiles”; and for ever will her lovers follow after. Whether Emily in her short life had a human lover, whether the “sweet love of youth” of whom she sang in her haunting threnody had a human name, is a part of the question to which in all probability no answer will ever come now, out of the mist or over the edge of the moor; but this at least is certain, that she has a host of lovers in the world today. And it is to them especially that this book will be addressed.

A third excuse was tossed to me, as I pursued my studies, by Charlotte herself. "Miss Brontë could be very sharp-spoken," declared all her Sunday-School scholars when they were old Haworth ladies; and in one of her tarter moods she wrote to Mrs. Gaskell: "You do well to set aside odious comparisons, and to wax impatient of that trite twaddle about 'nothing newness'—a jargon which simply proves in those who habitually use it, a coarse and feeble faculty of appreciation; an inability to discern the relative value of originality and novelty; a lack of that refined perception which, dispensing with the stimulus of an ever-new subject, can derive sufficiency of pleasure from freshness of treatment." Thank you, Charlotte, for those sustaining and fortifying words; and let us hope that in the ensuing pages will be found, here and there, enough newness of treatment to justify them. A fourth excuse is proper only to myself, but I shall not hesitate to set it down (since I need all I can find). It is this: a number of people were kind enough to like another small book in this series, and from this pen, on the subject of St. Francis; and I cannot but feel that a book on Emily Brontë and her family will be of interest to these more than good people, since there is a kinship and likeness between Francesco Bernadone on his Umbrian Mountains and Emily Brontë on her Yorkshire hills. Emily, like Francis, was a mystic, and there is a place where all mystics meet and know that they are one. It has seemed to me that new things might be written about the mysticism of Emily; and I have presumed to attempt them.

But when all the excuses have been marshalled for review, it is probably all too plain that one's only reason for writing a book about the Brontës is because one wants to; "because", as the little girl said in the poem, "it liketh me". It would appear that there is a craving in every novelist to write one book about the Brontës.

What the explanation of this phenomenon may be I do not know; unless it is that he feels he knows so much more about them than anyone else and will be happier when relieved of this weight of knowledge. The three sisters and their brother, writing, writing, in their narrow rooms; writing and dreaming with the heedless world at the foot of the hill; failing and failing, and at last succeeding, though not in the lifetime of all, beyond

their largest dreams ; this family of four children are the very picture of literary aspiration and effort ; and all or most that they suffered the smallest novelist has suffered too ; and so he thinks that he understands them as only a brother can, and, being by trade a novelist, can tell their tale in all its comedy, tragedy, and triumph, with a virtuosity above that of far profounder scholars and critics.

And he is encouraged in this unamiable notion by a pronouncement of the late Sir Edmund Gosse to Mr. E. F. Benson (before Mr. Benson, a novelist, got down to *his* book on the Brontës) : "Nobody but a novelist should be allowed to write a biography, but he should remember that he is not now writing a novel." An excellent statement with an unexceptionable proviso. And let it be stated here that this counsel of Sir Edmund's has been laid like a touchstone against all the pages that follow. In them there is no *mise en scène*, no dialogue, no dramatic scene that cannot be justified from written evidence or honestly deduced from passages in the novels where Charlotte or Anne is quite obviously recalling the scenes of home. These pages aim at history, not fiction.

An impressive and doubtless significant fact about the library of Brontë biographies and commentaries is that nearly every book in it is a fight. More than any other this field on the literary estate is the site for a free-for-all. Sooner or later the contestants cast aside the trammelling garments of scientific calm and objectivity and lay about them with an extraordinary vigour—but a vigour that is, one feels, more entertaining than illuminating. Entertaining at first, and then somewhat exasperating so that one becomes conscious of an increasing need to engage a selection of the combatants in one's own quiet corner of the field and smite them before the Lord ; the purpose of such castigation being to instruct them in the stupidity of violence. This tendency to violence is to be seen at its liveliest—as a lifelong feminist I regret having to write this—in the women biographers. In their worship of Charlotte as an early feminist, in their anger at her frustration, in their worship of Emily and her grand achievement, or in their love of their own interpretation of this or that enigma and their love for the words in which they are couching it, they kindle and shout and are shrill. They loose wild tongues that have

not Truth in awe. Superlatives fly with a feverish fluency from their lips whether they are praising or blaming. Mrs. Gaskell began it. Either covertly or openly she sacrificed Mr. Brontë, the father, and Branwell, the brother, to make a sombre and lowering background for the white figure of Charlotte. Madame Duclaux followed in the same path. She blackened the features of Branwell in the prettiest prose to heighten the beauty of Emily. And it is a curious thing that the most feminine of the male critics, Swinburne, does exactly the same. His attack on Branwell like his attack on Keats is altogether too shrill to be worth listening to. "That lamentable and contemptible caitiff," he calls the brother of the Brontës; "contemptible, not so much for his commonplace debauchery as for his abject selfishness, his lying pretension, and his nerveless cowardice;" and he adds, "Emily Brontë's tenderness for the lower animals was so vast as to include even her own miserable brother." This just will not do. This must stop. There must be some attempt at quiet understanding and pity. All hate is blinding, as is all fanatical love; but pity is a penetrating light.

Now hear Miss May Sinclair (another novelist), blinded by her love for the idea that women of genius do not need experience of love in order to create such passionate scenes as are found in *Jane Eyre*, *Villette*, and *Wuthering Heights*. Of Charlotte she writes: "She was pure, utterly pure, from all the illusions and subtleties and corruptions of the sentimentalists, and she could trust herself in friendship. She brought to it ardours and vehemences she would never have allowed to love. If she let herself go in her infrequent intercourse with M. Heger it was because she was so far from feeling in herself the possibility of passion." And from this, her chosen ground, she heaps harsh words on all who had dared to hint that the love scenes between Jane Eyre and Rochester, Lucy Snowe and Paul Emmanuel, had been partly inspired by Charlotte's tragic and inadmissible love for M. Heger in Brussels. That was in 1911. In 1913 the impassioned and heart-breaking love letters of Charlotte to M. Heger were published in *The Times*.

Of Emily Miss Sinclair writes, all her balance and rationality unhinged by indignation: "No tale of passion such as they tell of Charlotte was ever told of Emily. It

may be told yet, for no secret thing belonging to this disastrous family is sacred. There may be somewhere some awful worshipper of Emily Brontë, impatient of her silence and unsatisfied with her strange, her virgin and inaccessible beauty, who will one day make up a story of some love affair of which her moors have kept the secret; and he will tell his tale. But we shall at least know that he has made it up. And, even so, it will have been better for that man if he had never been born." Oh, come, come. Quite soon, unaware of Miss Sinclair's heavy curse, or defying it, Miss Isobel Clarke (a novelist), in *her* biography, *Haworth Parsonage*, did precisely this: she provided a full, neat, close-woven and delicately tinted love story for Emily. There it is for anyone to read: a delightful idyll. But though I can find no evidence anywhere to justify a word of it, I cannot even begin to wish that Miss Clarke's father had never begotten her. On the contrary I wish her many more happy days, for she is a fellow-gleaner in the same field, and patently an enthusiastic one.

Then there is Miss Romer Wilson: Miss Romer Wilson, blinded with love for her own sudden perception (so far as I can understand it in her fervent, lyrical contribution *All Alone*) that Emily had given herself to Satan. To sustain herself in this love she is driven to many extraordinary surmises of which the most remarkable is her guess that Emily's magnificent *credo*, "Vain are the thousand creeds, To waken doubt in one Holding so fast by Thine infinity", is really Satan's hymn to himself as God.

And lastly, not a dozen years since, and in the most recent Brontë biography, occurred what is perhaps the most curious case of all of this infectious Brontë blinding. In 1936 Miss Virginia Moore published her *Life and Eager Death of Emily Brontë*; and if we are to judge from her introduction, and from the publishers' enthusiasm on the book-jacket, the achievement of which she was exceedingly proud was her discovery of Mr. Louis Parenzell. "Not only is this new biography written with sympathy and insight," say the publishers, "but it incorporates some heretofore unknown dates and a provocative name to conjure with. . . ."

The provocative name is Louis Parenzell. And, reading the book, we find that Louis Parenzell is of no small importance to the authoress because he is almost the only evidence she can find, apart from some insecure support in the Gondal poems, that Emily was not a Lesbian but capable of loving a man. She heads her twenty-first chapter, "Rival Hypothesis Leaning Heavily on the Gondal Legend and Louis Parenzell", and blinded by her desire to believe she has found a piece of entirely new evidence, she devotes several detailed and scholarly pages to the story of her researches and her successful unearthing before all others of this provocative name. It is an exciting and even affecting narrative. In the British Museum, we are told, is a small red-covered note-book, measuring four inches by six; and it contains, in Emily's minute hand-print, forty-six of her poems. The poems are headed by Emily's titles, and in some cases by different titles, presumably in Charlotte's hand and written there when she was editing and making a selection of Emily's poems for publication after her death. There are also marginal marks by Mr. Nicholls, Charlotte's husband. Mr. Nicholls must have presented the little book to Charlotte's publisher, George Smith; and George Smith's children, in 1933, bequeathed it to the British Museum.

Thus Miss Moore, a later biographer than any other, was the first to enjoy the advantage of this manuscript. No other editor, she explains, knew about it; or, if he knew about, he either did not examine it at all or examined it with insufficient attention. "Hence I was able to discover in it many unknown dates for poems . . . and—most arresting and intriguing—the name 'Louis Parenzell' written above the poem, *I knew not 'twas so dire a crime.*"

The theme of this poem is grief and hurt pride at the going away of a loved one. Then who, asks Miss Moore, wrote the name, 'Louis Parenzell', above the poem? Not Emily, she decides. And not Mr. Nicholls before he gave the little book to the Smith family. Then by process of elimination it was Charlotte. "Does reason bear this out? Does stern study with a microscope? Yes—very decidedly." And she concludes that Charlotte "either knew or suspected that the tragedy of Emily's heart, as expressed in that poem, involved Louis Parenzell; and she could not

in her ruminations after Emily's death resist jotting down the fact"

"There remains a third possibility," she allows; "that Charlotte suspected, but wrongly, basing the surmise on an inconsequence. This, if true, would vitiate the Louis Parenzell defence against the hypothesis of (Emily's) peculiarity. It would mean that in spite of Charlotte's convinced and deliberate recording of 'Louis Parenzell' Emily may have cared not a fig for that or any man, and given all her affection to a girl—a woman. I do not know. I anno once 'Louis Parenzell' as a possible but not a certain revelation. . . . Inquiries in Haworth and vicinity have not yet confirmed the existence of Louis Parenzell a hundred years ago."

This is not surprising, for the poem is a haughty assurance from a lover to his beloved that if she can forget her sacred vows, he can forget her too; and a glance at the little manuscript, with no more aid than a magnifying glass can give, shows that the name above the poem is not "Louis Parenzell" but "Love's Farewell".

It is a pity that Miss Moore slipped so heavily on this easy slope, and it is to be hoped that her tumble, while provoking a reasonable hilarity, will not finally discredit her book, for it is the product of untiring research, and a treasure-store of facts for a circumspect student. I for one am indebted to it not a little for its careful assembling of facts and dates.

Very well then; there are a hundred books about the Brontës; and here is another. It will eschew, I trust, the violences and eager illusions against which we have animadverted above; but will have beyond doubt many faults and weaknesses of its own. Nevertheless, and despite its hundred predecessors, I submit it without great fear; in the first place because among the vast audience of Brontë lovers there is a large majority which is still astonishingly vague about the lines of their story; and in the second place because it is manifest by now to any author that those of the Cult, though they know all that is to be known, will always, like the Catholic faithful in *Villette*, attend the *lecture pieuse* and hear the old story told.

INVARIABLE INVOCATION BY M. HEGER
BEFORE EMBARKING UPON THE INSTRUCTION
OF A CLASS

*Esprit de Sagesse, conduisez-nous ;
Esprit de Vérité, enseignez-nous ;
Esprit de Charité, vivifiez-nous ;
Esprit de Prudence, préservez-nous ;
Esprit de Force, défendez-nous ;
Esprit de Justice, éclairez-nous ;
Esprit de Consolateur, apaisez-nous.*

CHAPTER ONE

IT has often been suggested that the parsonage at Haworth stands in a grey loneliness at the edge of civilisation and, though its grimness and remoteness have been much exaggerated for the sake of picturesqueness, there is a sense in which, not without profit, we can think of it as situated on the frontier of the inhabited world and on the fringe of wild, inhuman places.

There is, or was a hundred years ago, something symbolic in its lofty position. Leaving the mills in the river bottom, the little stone houses clamber up the hill (which is certainly very steep and tiring but not "precipitous" as the chroniclers so frequently declare) to reach at last an inn, the church with its square tower, the large graveyard around it, and there, almost at the summit, the parsonage with its little walled garden. And a hundred years ago that was about all. Behind the parsonage were Parson's Fields and beyond them the heaving moors, rolling away, billow upon billow, under the whole of the sky. The churchyard with its table tombs and listing headstones embraced the parsonage garden on two sides. Thus we may say that church, churchyard, and minister's house stood exactly where humanity finished its climb, and the silent and empty hills, symbols of eternity, began. And then we shall be at once reminded of Christina Rosetti and her poem, "Does the road wind uphill all the way?" Here is the inn which you cannot miss, the ministrations you will need at the end of the day, and the beds for all who come.

Church and parsonage have been altered since the Reverend Patrick Brontë's time, so let us see them as they were in the year 1821. The oblong parsonage, in 1821, is a neat, flat-fronted, eighteenth-century house, built of the cream-coloured local stone known as Haworth building grit. It has two symmetrical windows, crossed with glazing bars, on either side of the pedimented doorway, five similar windows above; and a stone-flagged roof. All these windows gaze at the sloping rectangle of garden, the sloping graveyard beyond, and the church a little below. The

church is a large barn with arched windows and a squat tower, most of whose stones are much older than itself. A lane, paved with stone setts, climbs by the side of church, churchyard, and parson's garden wall. The church schools across this lane are not built yet; but they will rise in Mr. Brontë's time and under his eye.

On a September afternoon in this year 1821 six very young children five girls and one boy, turned out of the parsonage gate and walked towards the moors, the girls in their capes and bonnets, and the boy in a cap with a peak. Being so very young they went hand in hand, and their nurse shepherded them along, giving occasional help to the smallest. At least, so Mrs. Gaskell says, who was the first to tell their story; but some have wondered at the picture, since the youngest child at this date was only twenty months old. Still, she was a Brontë, so let us keep this sixth child with the others, and say only that the progress must have been chequered and slow.

The eldest, Maria, was a grave child of eight, with wise eyes, who enjoyed helping and guiding the smaller ones and playing the mother. She was always grave, but today she was graver than ever before because she knew what was happening in the house. The second child, Elizabeth, was seven years old, but I cannot describe her to you because in all the vast library of documents there is hardly a word about her. We know nothing of what was in that cape and bonnet. Elizabeth is for us but a wraith. The third was a tiny little creature, too small for her five years, but by no means insignificant with her ample brown hair, her large and rather protuberant forehead, her big mouth, and her wide, brown, and splendidly shining eyes. Her name was Charlotte. The fourth was the boy, small too, but with a handsome face under a crop of tawny, untidy hair. The fifth was the only one tall for her age and by all accounts the prettiest, with her dark brown hair, grey-blue eyes, and pale skin. This was Emily. The sixth was the stumbling baby, Anne.

They took the track across Parson's Fields, threading through the creep-holes in the dry-stone walls, and, when the last of these walls was behind, found themselves on the fringe of the moors. Rejoicing in this fenceless and illimitable playground, they ran

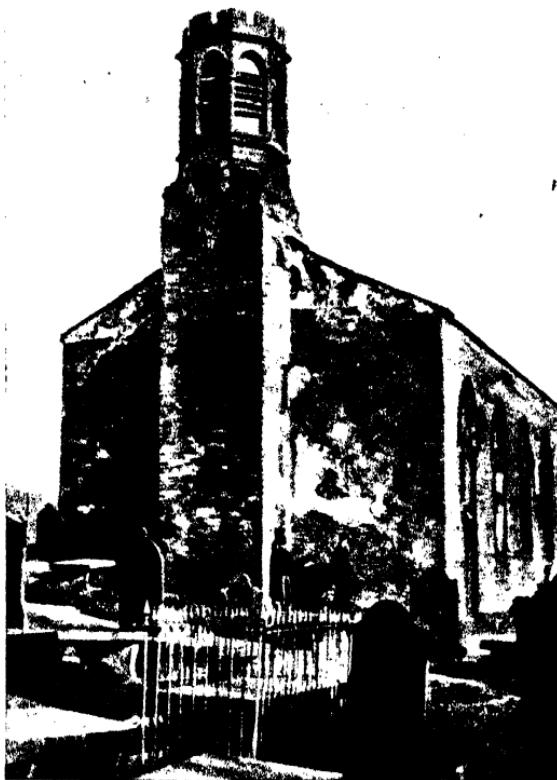


The First Home of Patrick and Maria Brontë,
Hightown, Hartshead



The Butcher's Shop, Thornton

**The Bell Chapel,
Thornton, as it
was at the time
of the Brontës**



**The Bell Chapel
as it is now**



into the bracken and the bilberry clumps and the heather. It was September, and the heather lay in huge purple rugs on a pelt of coarse, waving grass. The bracken was as high as their shoulders, and we can conceive that it completely engulfed the undersized Charlotte and the infant Anne. Down below, on their right, the last of the Intake grass, behind its running stone wall, was as lush and brilliant a green as the cotton grass above the heather-line was pallid and grey. Up here the ling and the whortleberry defied the Intake to come further; and the tops of the moors, so stoutly defended, held themselves aloof and free and disdainful, for they were beyond all fear of the powers and pretensions of men.

Because in such a high solitude there were no human figures, the eyes of the children fed upon the animals that moved in the thick vegetation or flew in the enormous sky: the hares scurrying from their footfalls, the red grouse rising with a whirr and an angry plaint, a golden plover wheeling and calling overhead; a moor sheep crunching its meal of tough herbs; the peewits flopping down on to the peat; and perhaps a wedge of migrant geese flying into England for their winter rest. It may be that they hoped to see an eagle, for their father had often told them that once upon a time there were eagles on Haworth and Stanbury Moors.

And it is possible that the make-believe imagination of one of these children, Emily, was already engaged by the wind-wrecked byres on the bowed shoulders of the moors, and her eyes fascinated by the bare, basic rocks lifting themselves out of the earth, the crags along the arcuated skyline, and the infinite emptiness that was nothing but colour melting into colour, above and beyond the rims of the world.

§

In an upper room of the house, behind those two windows on the left, the mother of these children lay dying, and a kindly old woman from the village watched by the four-poster bed. She was a very small woman, this mother of the Brontës, and it is possible that she had given her smallness to her third

known?—and she, though pregnant nearly all of the time, had been happy too because he was happy, and because the people of the village had been fond of them. It was after three years at Hartshead that they moved to Thornton and there, in the little parsonage house on Market Street, Charlotte, Branwell, Emily, and Anne had been born. (What a pity that her idly, straying mind could not visit the future as well as the past and see all those four children with their fame about them: a fame that does not easily die. What a pity that she could not see Emily, now but three years old, taking her seat among the Immortals.) The Bell Chapel at Thornton could not compare in charm and interest with the little hill-top church at Hartshead, but within its walls Elizabeth, Charlotte, Branwell, Emily, and Anne had all been christened; and she remembered carrying them to the font, and into the tiny vestry at the east end that their baptisms might be entered in the register.

To think of Thornton was to think of Haworth, and to remember how they had left that happy place and come over the moors to this new parish—a parish of villages cast upon the hills—and to this house where she now lay. Both stipend and house were larger here than at Thornton, and Patrick had believed, or tried to believe, that the air would be better for her and for the children on this high ground.

Her mind was back in the room, having completed its circular and wandering journey and its wistful survey of her nine years of married life. Back in the room where the memory awaited her that she was dying. The house was very quiet, for the children were out on the moors. Those six little children! “Oh, my poor, poor children!” it is reported to us that she said one day before she died. It is told also that she did not often ask to see them in her sick-room because she could not bear it. I daresay that she began to dream now of her own childhood in Penzance where everything was so different from these bleak Yorkshire hills that it might almost have been in a foreign land. She recalled, perhaps, the palm trees, and the warm west winds, and the scent of the sub-tropical gardens that drifted on the genial air. She saw St. Michael’s Mount in the bay and the ships leaving the port for the Scillies, and the pilchard fleet far out at sea. It is a revealing and moving little fact which

IN THE STEPS OF THE BRONTËS

Mrs. Gaskell records: that, when she was very ill and suffering greatly, she would sometimes, if the pain allowed it, ask her nurse to lift her up that she might see her clean the grate, "because she did it as it was done in Cornwall".

§

I visited Woodhouse Grove, now a large and flourishing public school, and saw the room from which Maria Branwell and Patrick Brontë were married; and Hartshead Church on its hill-top, and saw in its ancient register the entry, now brown and fading, of their first child's baptism; but like that disembodied spirit which was the sad, truant mind of Maria revisiting the old places, I lingered longest in Thornton. Of the Old Bell Chapel among the fields there remains only the ruined east wall, with Patrick's little vestry buttressing it behind. The louvred turret which housed the big bell has been placed like a monument on the site of the west wall; and between these, between lonely turret and shorn east wall, the grass flourishes like a hayfield, obscuring the eighteenth-century gravestones that once flagged the chapel floor. Around the ruins is a tilted acre of table tombs and gravestones; and where these stones are flat the grass has occupied them. Above this walled acre runs the road from Bradford; below it lies the green valley. There is a silence among the graves, broken only by the whispered syllables of unseen birds and by the murmur of traffic on the Bradford road. And it is a strange thing to stand in the grass between bell-tower and east wall and to think that over these hidden flags Maria carried her five children to be baptized; to peep through the rotting door of the vestry, now but a dank tool-shed, and to think that in there William Morgan, Patrick's best friend, signed the register for three of them, and John Fennel for two of them, while the amused father and the mother with her infant stood watching. The earth is rising around that very small vestry, so that its wall is partly buried.

Eighty years before these words were written Francis

Leyland, busy on a book in defence of Branwell, preceded me in the steps of the Brontës, and when he came to this place, this is what he found: "The chapel of Thornton is a narrow, contracted, and unsightly building. The north side is lighted by two rows of square cottage windows—on the south side five late perpendicular windows" (he was wrong: there were six) "permit the sun to relieve the gloom of the interior. The diminutive communion table is lighted by a mullioned window above which, externally, in the wall, appears the date, 1620. The interior is blocked, on the ground floor, with high-backed, unpainted deal pews. Two galleries hide the windows almost from view, and cast a gloom over the interior of the edifice. The area under the pews, and in the aisles, is paved with grave-stones, and a fetid, musty smell floats through the damp and mouldering interior. In this chapel Mr. Brontë preached and ministered, and from the pulpit, high above the curate and clerk, whence he delivered his sermons, he could see his wife and children just below him. The new incumbent seems to have taken an active interest in his chapel; for in the western screen, which divides a kind of lobby from the nave, is painted, on a wooden tablet, an inscription recording that in the year 1818, this chapel was 'Repaired and Beautified', the Rev. Patrick Brontë being then minister."

I crossed the road to the big new church where the present vicar very kindly abstracted for me from his safe the old registers of the Bell Chapel. Torn slips of paper between the leaves marked certain entries, so that the books opened easily at the right pages. He opened them, and there, among innumerable entries by "P. Brontë, Minister", now brown and fading, were five in a different hand. Two were written by "Jno. Fennel, Officiating Minister", and three by "Wm. Morgan, Minister of Christ Church, Bradford". "1818. 20th August. Emily Jane . . . W. Morgan, Minister of Christ Church, Bradford". The ink had spluttered as he wrote it, down there in the tool-shed.

From the church, loth to leave the Old Bell Chapel and its memories, I walked towards the house which was once the minister's. Go along Market Street—somewhat narrow and grey but busy and populous, for Thornton is no longer a little

village of hand-loom weavers, but almost a suburb of industrial Bradford—and you will come to a small butcher's shop built out from the parlour of a commonplace stone house. Over the doorway of the shop you will read "R. Lovette, Family Butcher". This is the house, and it was in the room behind the shop that Charlotte, Branwell, Emily, and Anne were born.

Apparently it was not unusual in those days for the children to be born and the old people to die, if possible, in the best room of the house. Mr. Lovette, in his butcher's coat and apron, welcomed me with much friendliness and interest into this his little lock-up shop and showed me how he stored his bacon and made his sausages in the room where the children were born. He showed me also the old grate where a fire would be lit to warm and comfort the children on their entry into a cold world.

I passed out into the street and, standing there, recalled how Francis Leyland, when he stood here before me, found old inhabitants of Thornton who could remember the minister's little children playing in the space before the house. There were children of the town playing there now. I looked up at the first-floor windows, one pair of which lit the room that was Mr. Brontë's study, and I thought how happy he had been there composing his verses and his one prose romance. Already while at Hartshead he had written and issued, through local publishers, two new books, one a collection of poems, and one a prose tale; and here at Thornton he wrote some more poems and published an edifying tale, *The Maid of Killarney*. His poetry was conventional and pious, with little merit but a varied vocabulary, a correctitude of versification, an enviable ingenuity in rhyming, and, in view of his purposes, a fortunate security from unbecoming and disabling humour, as this example will show:

Oh when shall we see our dear Jesus?
 His presence from poverty frees us—
 And bright from His face
 The rays of His grace
 Beam, purging transgression for ever.

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Oh when shall we see our dear Jesus?
His presence from sorrow will ease us.

When up to the sky
With angels we fly—
Then farewell all sorrow for ever.

It certainly lacks something that is present in the poetry of his daughter Emily; but how he enjoyed the long sweet labour of creation. How happy he was, pacing the floor with words on his lips, or seated at his desk with pen in hand, in that room above Market Street. He heard neither the cartwheels on the setts, nor the voices of the children at play. In his preface to his *Cottage Poems* he says of its author: "When relieved from clerical avocations he was occupied in writing the *Cottage Poems*; from morning till noon, and from noon till night, his employment was full of indescribable pleasure such as he could wish to taste as long as life lasts. His hours glided pleasantly and almost imperceptibly by, and when night drew on, and he retired to rest, ere his eyes closed in sleep with sweet calmness and serenity of mind, he often reflected that though the delicate palate of criticism might be disgusted, the business of the day in the prosecution of his humble task was well-pleasing in the sight of God and by His blessing might be rendered useful to some poor soul who cared little about critical niceties, who lived unknown and unknowing in some little cottage, and whom, perchance, the Author might neither see nor hear of till that day when the assembled universe shall stand before the tribunal of the Eternal Judge."

Before I left the street in front of the house I thought of that day when the father and mother, the six children and their two nurses, Nancy and Sarah Garrs, came for the last time down those steps to the old waiting vehicle that was to carry them over the hills to their new home at Haworth.

§

A few days, and that little wasted woman lay dead in the upper room. The undertaker's men carried her out of the house and straight across the front garden to a gate in the wall

that opened on to the churchyard. All the biographers state that this gate at the foot of the garden was never opened except to let the dead go through, and some have called it the Gate of the Dead. Perhaps they are right, but at least one of the old Haworth ladies who used to be Charlotte's Sunday-School pupils was wont to say that when Mr. Brontë was very old she would see Charlotte after each service and every Sunday waiting at the foot of the pulpit stairs for her father and then walking out of the west door of the church with him on her arm and leading him through the tombs to the gate in the garden wall.

Still, the memories of old ladies are sometimes at fault, so let us keep the legend. Maria Brontë was the first of the family to go through the gate to the vault beneath the pavement of the church, and one by one her children, Anne only excepted, followed her. Last of all the old man himself came through the gate and lay down beside his family. After that the story was complete and the gateway was built up, as you may see now if you go and stand beneath the wall.

§

It is always imprecise to say of any event in childhood that this was the crucial event and the cause of all that happened afterwards. But as we watch Maria Brontë going through the gate we may certainly say, This was a principal cause, and there was none more important. This was an event that threw its light forward over the whole of the lives of the four children who survived to be men and women. How far would everything have been different if she had stayed with them? But she did not; she went from the house and left them incomplete and insecure.

Patrick Brontë, though fond of them, and proud of them, and ready as a rule to do all in his power to advance their ambitions, could not be a substitute for their mother, because to them for most of the day he was a withdrawn, silent, studious figure in the house; one who, as he would confess to his friends, was fretted by their "innocent but distressing prattle". To

a buried need and a buried fear may be attributed much of the introversion and shyness that wrapped and bound them all. Charlotte when a grown woman would turn her face away in an access of painful anxiety if a stranger came close and conversed with her. Branwell's eyes sought the ground till the drink released him, when all the imprisoned egotism burst forth in loud and lavish self-display. Emily fled from the kitchen if the baker's boy knocked and from the living-room if she entered suddenly and discovered strangers there. Anne was always quiet and timid and liable to religious melancholy. Charlotte in childhood escaped from the self-imprisonment by identification with her dream-hero, the greatest man in the Kingdom, the Duke of Wellington, or by imagining (most significantly) that she was one of his sons; and all her life she sought her "Master". Branwell escaped into dreams and drink and drugs and into a fantastic love for a woman several years older than he. Emily escaped into a masculine rebellion and, more happily, into mysticism and the arms of the Absolute. Anne did something akin to the latter in her paler and gentler way. In all of them there was both a craving for life and a readiness to die. All sought some compensation and fulfilment in imaginative writing. Yes, we may surely say that Maria Brontë, as she went through the gate, tossed much of the seed which became *Jane Eyre*, *Wuthering Heights*, *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*, and the winged poems of Emily.

CHAPTER TWO

THAT evening after they had laid her in the vault, or some days later, Mr. Brontë, alone in his study behind those two windows on the right of the front door, went through the letters and papers of his wife, to put them in order and lock them away. "The letters, however, must be put away, out of sight," wrote Charlotte in *Villette*; "people who have undergone bereavement always jealously gather together and lock away mementos; it is not supportable to be stabbed to the heart each moment by sharp revival of regret"; and she wrote this, as we shall see, thirty years later, after her father had taken these letters from his desk and sadly shown them to her. And Branwell, towards the end of his life, wrote a poem called *The End of All*, which begins:

In that unpitying Winter's night,
When my own wife—my Mary—died
I by my fire's declining light,
Sat comfortless and silent sighed.

Was he recalling a story his father had told him?

And Mr. Brontë himself, writing of this time to his old friend and late Vicar, John Buckworth, told him that there were seasons "when an affectionate, an agonising something sickened my whole frame. . . . When my dear wife was dead and buried and gone, and when I missed her at every corner, I do assure you, from what I felt, I was happy in the recollection that to sorrow was no sin; that our Lord himself had wept over his departed friend".

Among the mementos of his wife which he put away in his desk were a water-colour miniature of her in a cap and high-waisted frock, on the back of which he wrote "Portrait of my dear wife. P.B."; a manuscript of hers entitled *The Advantage of Poverty in Religious Concerns*, on which are these words in his hand, "The above was written by my dear wife and is for insertion in one of the periodical publications. Keep it as a memorial of her"; and the letters which she had written to him from

Woodhouse Grove when they were approaching each other and after they were promised to each other. That was nine years ago—between August and December, 1812—and already the paper was a little discoloured and brittle. I imagine he read them again with sighs, and occasionally with a broken smile as he came upon a passage in which she teased and rallied him; then tied them up with the manuscript and the miniature and laid them, sadly and unwillingly, in the drawer.

Thirty years afterwards, in 1850, when he was an old man of seventy-three, and all his children were dead except Charlotte, who lived with him in the quiet house, he took them from their secret place and put them in her hand. She herself has told the story in a letter that moves us as if it had been written yesterday. The emotion in it is fresh and fragrant after a hundred years.

“A few days since, a little incident happened which curiously touched me. Papa put into my hands a little packet of letters and papers, telling me they were Mamma’s, and that I might read them. I did read them, in a frame of mind I cannot describe. The papers were yellow with time, all having been written before I was born. It was strange now to peruse, for the first time, the records of a mind whence my own sprang; and most strange, and at once sad and sweet, to find that mind of a truly fine, pure, and elevated order. They were written to Papa before they were married. There is a rectitude, a refinement, a constancy, a modesty, a sense, a gentleness about them indescribable. I wish she had lived, and that I had known her.”

She returned them to him, and he put them back in their place. Six years later, when he was nearly eighty, having invited Mrs. Gaskell to write a “memoir” of his famous daughter, he took them out again and showed them to her, that she might know what Charlotte’s mother was like. “I have been permitted,” says Mrs. Gaskell, “to look over a series of nine letters which were addressed by her to Mr. Brontë during the brief term of their engagement in 1812. They are full of tender grace of expression and feminine modesty, pervaded by the deep piety to which I have alluded as a family characteristic.”

Then forty years passed, and in 1895 Mr. Clement Shorter

looked upon that little packet as Mrs. Gaskell had done. It was handed to him by Charlotte's husband. He had come to Ireland hoping to penetrate the reserve, the high palisade of silence and prohibition, which Mr. Nicholls had raised around himself in his native country to keep out those who sought to inquire into the privacies of his famous first wife, her family, and himself. Mr. Nicholls was an old man now, nearly eighty, and perhaps he was tired, or perhaps the long years had touched him to a new softness, for he welcomed Mr. Shorter into his fastness and put this packet of letters, together with everything else he could find, into his hand—and so into the world's hand. As in Charlotte's moved and moving record, so in Mr. Shorter's simple account of the incident, the emotion which he felt as he looked down upon these letters, much yellower now, comes from his pages quick and fragrant with life after fifty years—the more fragrant, indeed, for the passage of time.

"It was exactly forty years to a day after Charlotte died—March 31st, 1895," he writes, "when I alighted at the station of a quiet little town in the centre of Ireland, to receive the cordial handclasp of the man into whose keeping Charlotte Brontë had given her life. . . . Mr. Nicholls placed all the papers in his possession in my hands. They were more varied and abundant than I could possibly have anticipated. . . . Here were the letters Charlotte Brontë had written to her brother and to her sisters during her second sojourn in Brussels—to 'Dear Branwell' and 'Dear E.J.', as she calls Emily, letters which even to handle will give a thrill to the Brontë enthusiast. Here also were the love-letters of Maria Branwell to her lover, Patrick Brontë, which are referred to in Mrs. Gaskell's biography, but have never hitherto been printed. . . . Handling, with a full sense of sacredness, these letters, written more than eighty years ago by a good woman to her lover, one is tempted to hope that there is no breach of the privacy which should, even in our day, guide certain sides of life in publishing the correspondence in its completeness."

Mrs. Doris Long, formerly Mrs. Clement Shorter, most kindly allows me to quote from these letters, of which the copyright is hers. If it was strange for Charlotte to "peruse for the first time the records of a mind whence my own sprang",

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it is even more interesting for us, though in a different way, to read into the heart and mind of one of those from whom sprang Charlotte, Branwell, Emily, and Anne.

“**MY DEAR FRIEND**—This address is sufficient to convince you that I not only permit, but approve of yours to me—I do indeed consider you as my *friend*; yet, when I consider how short a time I have had the pleasure of knowing you, I start at my own rashness, my heart fails, and did I not think that you would be disappointed and grieved at it, I believe I should be ready to spare myself the task of writing. Do not think that I am so wavering as to repent of what I have already said. No, believe me, this will never be the case, unless you give me cause for it. You need not fear that you have been mistaken in my character. If I know anything of myself, I am incapable of making an ungenerous return to the smallest degree of kindness, much less to you whose attentions and conduct have been so particularly obliging. I will frankly confess that your behaviour and what I have seen and heard of your character has excited my warmest esteem and regard. . . .

“I thought on you much on Sunday, and feared you would not escape the rain. I hope you do not feel any bad effects from it? My cousin wrote you on Monday and expects this afternoon to be favoured with an answer. Your letter has caused me some foolish embarrassment, tho’ in pity to my feelings they have been very sparing of their raillery.

“I will now candidly answer your questions. The *politeness of others* can never make me forget your kind attentions, neither can I *walk our accustomed rounds* without thinking on you, and, why should I be ashamed to add, wishing for your presence. If you knew what were my feelings whilst writing this you would pity me. I wish to write the truth and give you satisfaction, yet fear to go too far, and exceed the bounds of propriety. . . . I rely on your goodness to pardon everything in this which may appear either too free or too stiff, and beg that you will consider me as a warm and faithful friend.”

In the next letter he is “*My dearest friend*”.

“**MY DEAREST FRIEND** . . . I do, indeed, *sometimes* think of you, but I will not say how often, lest I raise your vanity; and we sometimes talk of you. . . .”

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Is this Jane Eyre speaking to Rochester? But Charlotte did not read these letters till long after she had written *Jane Eyre*.

“. . . I will now tell you what I was thinking about and doing at the time you mention. I was then toiling up the hill with Jane and Mrs. Clapham to take our tea at Mr. Tatham’s, thinking on the evening when I first took the same walk with you, and on the change which had taken place in my circumstances and views since then—not wholly without a wish that I had your arm to assist me, and your conversation to shorten the walk. . . .

“I have now written a pretty long letter without reserve or caution, and if all the sentiments of my heart are not laid open to you, believe me it is not because I wish them to be concealed, for I hope there is nothing there that would give you pain or displeasure. My most sincere and earnest wishes are for your happiness and welfare, for this includes my own. Pray much for me that I may be made a blessing and not a hindrance to you. Let me not interrupt your studies nor intrude on that time which ought to be dedicated to better purposes. Forgive my freedom, my dearest friend, and rest assured that you are and ever will be dear to MARIA BRANWELL.

“Write very soon.”

“MY DEAREST FRIEND . . . You may expect frowns and hard words from her (Jane Fennel) when you make your appearance here again, for, if you recollect, she gave you a note to carry to the Doctor, and he has never received it. What have you done with it? If you can give a good account of it you may come to see us as soon as you please and be sure of a hearty welcome from all parties. Next Wednesday we have some thoughts, if the weather be fine, of going to Kirkstall Abbey once more, and I suppose your presence will not make the walk less agreeable to any of us.”

Jane Eyre again?

“I shall in future look to you for assistance and instruction whenever I may need them, and hope you will never withhold from me any advice or caution you may see necessary. . . .

“In circumstances of perplexity and doubt I have deeply felt the want of a guide and instructor. At such times I

have seen and felt the necessity of supernatural aid, and by fervent applications to a throne of grace I have experienced that my heavenly Father is able and willing to supply the place of every earthly friend. I shall now no longer feel this want, this sense of helpless weakness, for I believe a kind Providence has intended that I shall find in you every earthly friend united; nor do I fear to trust myself under your protection. or shrink from your control. It is pleasant to be subject to those we love. . . .

"Sat. morn.—I do not know whether you dare show your face here again or not after the blunder you have committed. When we got to the house on Thursday evening, even before we were within the doors, we found that Mr. and Mrs. Bedford had been there, and that they had requested you to mention their intention of coming—a single hint of which you never gave! Poor I too came in for a share in the hard words which were bestowed upon you, for they all agreed that I was the cause of it. Mr. Fennel said you were certainly *mazed*, and talked of sending you to York, etc. And even I begin to think that *this*, together with the *note*, bears some marks of insanity! However, I shall suspend my judgment until I hear what excuse you can make for yourself, I suppose you will be quite ready to make one of some kind or another. . . .

"Breakfast-time is near, I must bid you farewell for the time, but rest assured you will always share in the prayers and heart of your own MARIA."

"**M**Y DEAREST FRIEND . . . My thoughts often strayed from the company, and I would have gladly left them to follow my present employment. To write to and receive letters from my friends were always among my chief enjoyments, but none ever gave me so much pleasure as those which I receive from and write to my newly adopted friend. . . . If you have no other apology to make for your blunders than that which you have given me, you must not expect to be excused, for I have not mentioned it to any one, so that however it may clear your character in my opinion it is not likely to influence any other person. Little, very little, will induce me to cover your faults with a veil of charity. . . .

"But what nonsense am I writing? Surely after this you can

have no doubt that you possess all my heart. Two months ago I could not possibly have believed that you would ever engross so much of my thoughts and affections, and far less could I have thought that I should be so forward as to tell you so. I believe I must forbid you to come here again unless you can assure me that you will not steal any more of my regard. Enough of this; I must bring my pen to order, for if I were to suffer myself to revise what I have written I should be tempted to throw it in the fire, but I have determined that you shall see my whole heart. I have not yet informed you that I received your serio-comic note on Thursday afternoon, for which accept my thanks.

"Sunday morning.—I am not sure if I do right in adding a few lines today, but knowing that it will give you pleasure I wish to finish that you may have it tomorrow. I will just say that if my feeble prayers can aught avail, you will find your labours this day both pleasant and profitable, as they concern your own soul and the souls of those to whom you preach. I trust in your hours of retirement you will not forget to pray for me. I assure you I need every assistance to help me forward; I feel that my heart is more ready to attach itself to earth than heaven. I sometimes think there never was a mind so dull and inactive as mine is with regard to spiritual things."

Surely Jane Eyre is everywhere in the letters: Jane in her unconventional self-declaration, her impudence to her Master, and her piety. And that is to say there is much of Charlotte in these frail fragments. There is also something of the intensely moralistic Anne; but where is Branwell, and where is there a first glimpse or a first far note of Emily?

"With the sincerest pleasure do I retire from company to converse with him whom I love beyond all others. Could my beloved friend see my heart he would then be convinced that the affection I bear him is not at all inferior to that which he feels for me —indeed I sometimes think that in truth and constancy it excels. . . . The anticipation of sharing with you all the pleasures and pains, the cares and anxieties of life, of contributing to your comfort and becoming the companion of your pilgrimage, is more delightful to me than any other prospect which this work can possibly present. . . . I look forward with

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pleasure to Monday, when I hope to meet with you, for as we are no *longer twain* separation is painful, and to meet must ever be attended with joy."

"**MY DEAR SAUCY PAT**—Now don't you think you deserve this epithet far more than I do that which you have given me? I really know not what to make of the beginning of your last; the winds, waves, and rocks almost stunned me. I thought you were giving me the account of some terrible dream . . . having no idea that your lively imagination could make so much of the slight reproof conveyed in my last. What will you say when you get a *real, downright scolding*? Since you show such a readiness to atone for your offences after receiving a mild rebuke, I am inclined to hope you will seldom deserve a severe one. I accept with pleasure your atonement, and send you a free and full forgiveness. . . . I do not, cannot, doubt your love, and here I freely declare I love you above all the world besides. . . ."

"**MY DEAREST FRIEND** . . . Since I began this Jane put into my hands Lord Lyttelton's *Advice to a Lady*. When I read those lines, 'Be never cool reserve with passion joined, with caution choose, but then be fondly kind,' etc., my heart smote me for having in some cases used too much reserve towards you. Do you think you have any cause to complain of me? If you do, let me know it. For were it in my power to prevent it, I would in no instance occasion you the least pain or uneasiness. I am certain no one ever loved you with an affection more pure, constant, tender, and ardent than that which I feel. Surely this is not saying too much; it is the truth, and I trust you are worthy to know it. . . .

"**Adieu, my dearest.—I am your affectionate and sincere MARIA.**"

§

What did Mr. Brontë feel as he read again, before laying the letters in the drawer, that "Adieu, my dearest"? I think he walked to the window and, gazing out at the church without always seeing it, remained there for a while before returning with a sigh to his chair.

§

And now let us look well at Mr. Brontë as he sits bereaved. It is important to probe the lonely figure, for here is the other rock from which these children were hewn. It may be that we shall find Branwell and Emily here.

He is now forty-four and very grey (since in ten years he will be quite white): a tall man with a high forehead, worn and watering eyes, and a long nose on which are small-lensed spectacles in their metal frames. He wears a black suit and a white silk cravat so high that it touches the tips of his ears and wraps the tip of his chin. There is a long clay pipe on his desk and a spittoon within reach; and it is likely that he fills the pipe and, having lit it, sits there without reading any more, for his weak eyes are troubling him.

Let us consider first his frailties, but always with reference to our own. When he was a youth in Ireland, in Drumballyroney-cum-Drumgooland, County Down, he was a vessel charged to the lid with energy, industry, ability, and ambition; and these qualities carried him from the tiny thatched cabin where he was born, and which was all that his parents, Hugh Bruntty, or O'Prunty, and Alice Bruntty, peasant farmers, could afford—from that but-and-ben of the roadside to his present seat in the minister's house at Haworth. Here are the steps by which he achieved this praiseworthy climb: first he was a hand-loom weaver with a book propped up for study on his loom (just as Emily, half a century later, would prop up a German book on the kitchen table as she kneaded the dough or ironed the linen): then, having qualified himself, he became a teacher in the Presbyterian village school; then, having qualified himself further, the head teacher in the Drumballyroney Episcopalian school; then tutor to the parson's children; then an exhibitioner at St. John's College, Cambridge; then deacon and priest in the Church of England and successively curate of Wethersfield in Essex, Wellington in Shropshire, and Dewsbury in Yorkshire; then perpetual curate, which is to say Incumbent, of Hartshead and Thornton and Haworth. But now, having reached the middle forties and been his own master for ten years, he could no longer,

it seems, fan up the old ambition. From now on, for forty years, he would remain as fixed on his high place at Haworth as a limpet on the crown of a wave-beaten rock. The young man who at Hartshead and Thornton had been so genial and friendly and popular, and so eager to be a poet, and sometimes so vehement and violent (the father of Branwell?) was now the prisoner of habit, and a solitary. Custom had got him: it lay upon him like a weight, "heavy as frost, and deep almost as life". He could not escape from his familiar round at Haworth and, in the depths of him, did not want to. (And so it was with Charlotte, when the gates were suddenly flung open and the world was before her: however hard she tried, she could not escape from the parsonage and her father and the curate; but it was not they that imprisoned her; it was habit.) Between six and seven o'clock he got up and discharged the pistol which he had kept loaded against the unpredictability of human behaviour, and recharged it for another day; at nine he suffered his little family to come into his study for breakfast; at two o'clock he had his big meal, his dinner, quite alone in there, lest their distressing prattle kindled his indigestion; in the afternoon, no matter what the weather, he went for a long striding walk over the moors, preferring to be alone (so like his one tall daughter, Emily); at six o'clock he felt fond of the children and took his tea with them in the living-room, but quickly (one suspects if one is a father) heard the summons of his study; at eight o'clock he called them to prayers; and at nine o'clock punctually he went up the stone staircase to his bedroom, first winding the clock on the landing.

There were two pairs of shrewd eyes which scanned him in later days, those of his daughter Charlotte, and those of Mrs. Gaskell, which twinkled. Of the Rev. Mr. Helstone in *Shirley* Charlotte wrote: "Nature never intended Mr. Helstone to make a very good husband, especially to a quiet wife. He thought so long as a woman was silent nothing ailed her, and she wanted nothing"; and Mrs. Gaskell, in a good sentence, deliberately opaque since it was for publication and Mr. Brontë would read it, described him as "not dramatic enough in his perceptions to see how miserable others might be in a life that to him was all-sufficient"; and in some other sentences, bright as the mid-day sun since they were never intended for publication, declared: "He was

very polite and agreeable to me, paying rather elaborate old-fashioned compliments; but I was sadly afraid of him in my inmost soul; for I caught a glare of his stern eyes over his spectacles at Miss Brontë once or twice which made me know my man. . . . Moreover, to account for my fear—rather an admiring fear after all—of Mr. Brontë, please to take into account that though I like the beautiful glittering of bright, flashing steel I don't fancy fire-arms at all, at all—and Miss Brontë never remembers her father dressing himself in the morning without putting a loaded pistol in his pocket, just as regularly as he puts on his watch. There was this little deadly pistol sitting down to breakfast with us, kneeling down to prayers at night. . . .”

Mrs. Gaskell has given us no more delightful picture than this one “off the record”: herself kneeling at prayer in Mr. Brontë’s study, with one eye travelling ever and anon to Mr. Brontë’s hip; her situation that of King Claudius, for while her words flew up to heaven her thoughts remained below—on Mr. Brontë’s armed and neighbouring hip.

He was a snob. Obliged to tell Mrs. Gaskell of his humble beginnings in Drumballyroney he was careful to expound to her a tradition that his parents were descended from an ancient family. Once having become a gentleman at Cambridge University, and the King of Sicily having bestowed the title of Duke of Brontë on Lord Nelson, he began to spell his name in that noble way. All his life he told new acquaintances that when he joined the Volunteers in 1802, that first Home Guard which prepared itself to withstand the worst that Napoleon could launch against our island, he used to drill beside his fellow-student, Henry John Temple, afterwards Lord Palmerston. He took Branwell from the little grammar school at Haworth because the local boys were of an inferior order to his son. When Sir James and Lady Kay-Shuttleworth, people of title, came seeking the now famous Charlotte and inviting her to stay at Gawthorpe Hall, and she dreaded the visit, shuddering away from them and their servants and the great house, he fairly drove her forth to them. “Papa is restless and eager for me to go, the idea of a refusal quite hurts him.” In all her letters to her father (and in no others) when she was being lionised in London, she mentions for

his happiness all the titles that she had met or that had spoken to her. She delights him with Duchesses, Marquises, and Earls. "The Marquis of Westminster and the Earl of Ellesmere each sent me an order to see their private collection of pictures. . . . The morning I was there I met Lord Glenelg and Mrs. Davenport, a relation of Lady Shuttleworth's, and a very beautiful and fashionable woman. . . . You will know, dear Papa, that I do not mention these things to boast of them but merely because I think they will give you pleasure." And when his curate, Mr. Nicholls, had the effrontery, he a mere nobody, a mere curate from Ireland, a mere descendant of farmers, to ask his daughter to marry him, Mr. Brontë's indignation in its violence was such as to frighten the household and he shouted to Charlotte that the match would degrade them.

While his praises of poverty in verse and sermon were everything that his profession required, he was not a little interested in money and enjoyed the gleam of it when he saw it coming towards him. Of parsons visiting the house he would inquire what their livings were worth. When Charlotte's publishers sent only the usual £500 for *Villette* he was disappointed because he had been counting on £750 this time. One of his arguments against Mr. Nicholls' impudent proposal was the man's want of money, but he suddenly became resigned to him as a son-in-law when Charlotte pointed out that he would not only do most of Mr. Brontë's work for him but also pay for his residence in the parsonage which would "in a pecuniary sense bring gain instead of loss".

Reviewing the portrait which we have sketched so far, what do we see? A man hot with ambition in youth, but cooler in middle age; fond of children in theory, but quick to fly from them and shut his door; comfort-loving, custom-bound, and all too self-centred; eager for a good seat among the dignitaries at the high tables; loud and violent at times, if incensed; and seldom disposed, whatever his academic or professional views about money, to take a penny less than his due. To me it is very like the face I meet on a clear day in the mirror.

And now let us sketch in a few virtues. He was a good son and brother. As long as his mother lived he sent her £20 a year out of an income of about £200. More than once he sent help to his

brothers and sisters in Ireland, and in his will he left a sum to be divided among them. His wife and children loved him, his servants liked him, and his parishioners respected him. "Ought I not to be thankful that he never gave me an angry word?" said Mrs. Brontë towards the end; and if there is a hint of disappointment in that "Ought I not", well. *vanitas vanitatum*, which of us is completely happy in this world? He allowed no one but himself to nurse her at night: an example of dutiful ministry which he repeated when, an old man of 71, he slept always by the side of his delirious and violent son. Charlotte loved him, while feeling critical of him like any other daughter who is not a fool. "When anything ails Papa I feel too keenly that he is the *last*, the only near and dear relation I have in the world." "The circumstances of Papa being just now in good health gives me many causes of gratitude. When we have but one precious thing left we think much of it."

Let the biographers blacken him as they may, these words stand. And they were written by one of the most caustic pens that ever summed up the shortcomings of others. Useless to say that Charlotte was as blindly loyal to her family as she was censorious about her neighbours, for we have her bitter reprobation of Branwell. All his servants spoke well of Mr. Brontë. Of Nancy Garris he asked one day, genially invading her kitchen, "Nancy, is what I've heard true, that you are going to marry a Pat?" and Nancy answered, "Yes, sir, I believe it is; and if he prove but a tenth part as kind a husband to me as you are to Mrs. Brontë I shall count myself very happy in having made a Pat my choice." We may allow for a little kitchen diplomacy here, but the words would be senseless without a basis in fact.

And Nancy, after his death, when she heard of the violences which Mrs. Gaskell had attributed to him, averred in hot indignation: "There never was a more affectionate father, never a kinder master. He was not of a violent temper at all; quite the reverse." His parishioners used to say, "He's a grand man; he lets other folks' business alone"; and this, if of doubtful value as testimony to his pastoral activities, is a tribute to him as a neighbour. On the day when they carried him to the vault in his church Haworth, we are told, was full of mourners. The shops

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were closed and business entirely suspended. The Rev. Dr. Burnet, of Bradford, and the Rev. Dr. Cartman, of Skipton, preceded the coffin, which was borne from parsonage to church by six clergymen of the district, the incumbents of Cullingworth, Oakworth, Oxenholme, Morton, Ingrow, and Hebden Bridge. "The day of mourning," concludes the record, "will long be remembered in Haworth."

Of course he knew nothing about Christianity. No matter how many sermons he preached in the old three-decker pulpit, or how many parsons carried him to the vault beneath it, he knew not the heart of the matter. He understood theology; he understood and proclaimed the conventional code of morals; but he was blind to the simple truth that Christianity, in its essence, is the worship of ruth instead of ruthlessness; the sudden happy perception that ruthlessness is not virile but puerile, and that mercy and forgiveness are the marks of an adult man. Or if he was not quite blind to it, let us say that he was not at all keen on this aspect of Christianity as the foregoing of vindictiveness and pugnacity. But he was not exceptional in thus averting his eyes from the real and uncomfortable meaning of his Captain's General Routine Order. This aspect of Christianity was not popular among the clergy of those days, and, as far as I can see, it is no more popular now.

§

The quaint story of how Mr. Brontë once put a mask over his children's faces that they might answer his questions without fear and so reveal their real quality has been told uncounted times; but has it ever been pointed out that the story reveals, not the children but him; that the mask was indeed a mask for the children but a mirror for their father? In this mirror we, if not he, may see something of his face.

Some time after Mrs. Brontë's death—about two years according to him; but he admitted that his memory was uncertain—he paraded the six little children in one of the rooms and, beginning with the youngest, Anne, put the mask over her face and bade her speak out boldly. "Now, what does a child

like you want most?" he asked her; and she answered, "Age and experience." Good: indeed, very good; and next it was Emily's turn. Emily went under the mask. "What had I best do with Branwell when he's naughty?" Her answer was prompt. "Reason with him, and when he won't listen to reason, whip him." Quite right; and now came Branwell, who had perhaps taken a poor view of this answer. Mr. Brontë asked him what was the best way of knowing the difference between the intellects of men and women. "By considering," opined Branwell, "the difference between them as to their bodies," and Mr. Brontë passed quickly to Charlotte. "What is the best book in the world?" "The Bible," she answered most readily. "And the next best?" "The Book of Nature." Excellent; and so to Elizabeth. "What is the best mode of education for a woman?" "That which makes her rule her house well," Elizabeth provided. Mr. Brontë nodded and turned to Maria, the grave eldest child. "What is the best mode of spending your time?" And Maria answered, "By laying it out in preparation for a happy eternity."

Really, if Mr. Brontë supposed that these were anything but professional answers—the diplomatic replies of underlings who believed the governor should be given what he wanted—he must have been quite a simple man for all his scholarship, his sense of his own importance, and his wide reputation as a preacher. And we can only assume that he did suppose so, because he wrote the tale to Mrs. Gaskell as if proud of his own ingenuity and his children's originality. He did not perceive that the tale provided the discerning with nothing but a reflection of himself. The children, to save trouble and time, gave him what he wanted to hear; and what he wanted to hear was this: that children should be humble, accepting their foolishness and his wisdom; that they should be obedient, the obedience to be enforced if necessary with the whip; that women should realise their inferiority and keep to their place in the home; and that all people should accept the teaching and discipline of the Protestant Church of England, in its puritan form, as the best preparation for a happy eternity.

CHAPTER THREE

THE three years between the death of their mother and the sending of the girls to school, the years when Charlotte grew from five to eight, Branwell from four to seven, and Emily from three to six, must have been of capital significance in their lives; but unfortunately the records are sparse on which imagination can play. There is the tale of the mask, but this, as we have suggested, tells us more about the father than the children. There is Mr. Brontë's statement that, as soon as they could read, they would invent and act little plays of their own, in which the Duke of Wellington, Charlotte's hero, was sure to come off conqueror, though there were disputes at times regarding the comparative methods of his strategy and those of Buonaparte, Hannibal, and Caesar; disputes in which Mr. Brontë was summoned to pronounce a decision. We know that in 1822, the year after Mrs. Brontë's death, her eldest sister, their Aunt Branwell, came from Penzance to take her place and care for them. And we know that they were given the little room above the entrance hall, itself no bigger than a passage, for their "study".

Imagination, gathering up these traces and gazing into them, sees the children at play, when the days were warm, in the garden before the house or on the moors behind it, both of which places were transfigured for them into the battlegrounds of Wellington, Hannibal, and Caesar. And on autumn and winter days, when the wind invested the house and sang its mournful staves among the tombs, we see the play transferred to the little whitewashed cell, nine feet by six, between the bedroom of their father and the room in which their mother had died. Four, five, or six children are at play there; bound in a nutshell, but kings of infinite space because they are loose in the dreamland distances of childhood.

We can be certain that they were happy for most of the day; as happy in the narrow box-room as in the vast chamber of the moors; because a party of children can be happy anywhere, and especially if they are left alone. Maria, growing from eight to eleven, was still their shepherdess and happy

mother--and sometimes their happy governess, for after discussing with her father, at length and with a grave-eyed interest, the politics of the time she would return to her charges and instruct them why they should be good Tories and good Anglicans; why Mr. Canning was a dangerous man who should be watched; and why they should give their full support in these critical days to the Duke of Wellington and Mr. Peel. In the evenings, I am sure, she helped to put them to bed and made them say their prayers.

Charlotte, six years old or seven, was the most interested in people, scrutinising them with her wide-open and fixed brown eyes; Branwell was most interested in himself, showing off that talented person at every opportunity and bossing them about, since he was the only man; Anne, I conceive, was content with a gentle following of the others; and Emily—well, imagination, working back from its knowledge of the future, can spend a charmed hour with this early Emily, as she climbs about the moors, dreams in the garden, or shares the game in the box-room. I think that, besides her wonder and her make-believe on the boundless moors, there was a bewilderment in her mind, and a nascent exasperation, at the suppressions and prohibitions to which she was subject:

I'll walk where my own nature would be leading—
It vexes me to choose another guide—

and a jealousy of Branwell of whom, as a boy, so much was predicted, and to whom so much praise and admiration was given, since she felt, with a militant conviction, that she was his equal, if not his superior.

Often rebuked, yet always back returning
To those first feelings that were born with me. . . .

§

It was a moment of some drama, exciting in a way but probably tinged with alarm and disappointment too, when their father told them that their Aunt Branwell was coming to live

with them. The elder ones knew her well, of course, because she had come sometimes before when there was need of her; whether their pleasure or their dismay at the news was the greater we cannot know. Aunt Branwell arrived and settled herself and her few treasures in the large front bedroom where she had nursed her dying sister. She was a little plump woman of between forty and fifty, dressed usually in a black silk gown (had she not been of the first society in Penzance?) and decorated on proper occasions with gold ornaments, such as the gold eyeglass on a long gold chain, and the gold snuff-box in her hand; and she rustled about the house, holding her purple shawl about her shoulders and lifting her full skirt out of the way of her feet as she ascended the stairs.

Three things about her always fascinated the children: her enormous cap, her fringe of auburn curls, and the wooden pattens in which after a time, fearing that the cold of the stone floor might make a subtle entry into her system, she clattered and clumped over the flags of the ground-floor rooms, up the stone stairs, and across the wood flooring above. The giant cap seems to have haunted Charlotte all her life. She placed it on the head of Mrs. Yorke in *Shirley*. Hortense Moore, in that book, opening her parlour door, "made visible an ample spread of crimson skirts overflowing the elbow-chair at the fireside, and above them, presiding with dignity, a cap more awful than a crown. That cap had never come to the cottage under a bonnet; no, it had been brought in a vast bag, or rather a middle-sized balloon of black silk, held wide with whalebone. The screed, or frill, of the cap stood a quarter of a yard broad round the face of the wearer. The ribbon, flourishing in puffs and bows about the head, was of the sort called love-ribbon. There was a good deal of it, I may say, a very great deal. Mrs. Yorke wore the cap—it became her."

There is to be no heat in this book, so it will suffice if we denominate as insufferable idiots those who assert that this excellent little lady in her huge frilled cap and gold chain was the original of, or a model for, Mrs. Reed in *Jane Eyre*, that cruel, grasping, and dishonourable woman. No doubt that Miss Branwell, correct, narrow, punctilious, and positive, tried to force the children into her own polite moulds, and that she failed to

win much affection from any of them except Branwell; but the pleasant facts remain that she came always to her sister's side when help was needed; that with the same high sense of duty she left her comfortable home and all her friends in Penzance to give the rest of her life to that sister's husband and children; that she afforded him, as Mr. Brontë wrote to Mr. Buckworth, "great comfort to his mind by sharing his labours and sorrows and behaving as an affectionate mother to his children"; that she insisted on contributing out of her small income of £50 a year her share of the household expenses; that she was fond of the children and good to them, giving them presents, lending them money out of her modest capital and leaving it all to them and one other niece when she died. In all the mass of correspondence that documents the ensuing years I can find no record of her having done an unkind thing. You may see something of her nature, precise but loving, in an inscription she wrote upon a three-volume set of Scott's *Tales of a Grandfather*: "The volumes were written by Sir Walter Scott, and the Hugh Little John mentioned in them is Master Lockhart, grandson to Sir Walter. A New Year Gift by Miss E. B. to her dear little nephew and nieces, Patrick, Charlotte, Emily and Anne Brontë, 1828."

Of course she would impress upon them somewhat too frequently that she had done a virtuous thing in leaving for their sakes the warm air and the palm trees and flowers of Penzance; she was apt to stress that in the upper circles of Penzance society, which occupied so indisputably a superior place to those of Haworth, she had been in her day something of a belle, and that it had cost her not a little to leave a place where she was admired and loved; but this is only to admit that she halted several steps this side of sanctity. Good people do good things, but it requires (at least in my experience) the mortification of the saints to do them only in the sight of one's Father in heaven. Penzance was her first husband, and Haworth her second; and while she was a good wife to both she dwelt upon the kindness and warmth of the first too often for the comfort of the second.

We must blame Mr. Brontë that she took to living almost wholly in her room and having her meals sent up to her there: a bad example is contagious. There in that front bedroom she would have the girls for their lessons; and there in the afternoons

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she made them sew and embroider and work samplers, as young ladies should; while she sat before them as their exemplar, her embroidery frame in her hand and her Indian work-box and gold snuff-box at her side. Now she cut the threads of silk; now she lifted a new skein from the work-box; and now took a quiet pinch from the snuff-box.

After about a year of her correct and laudable rule Mr. Brontë, down in his study, thinking his own thoughts, and hungering for love and a woman as only a self-centred man of forty-five can, decided that Miss Branwell would be better displaced by a wife; and, quite unknown to her in the room upstairs, he wrote to his good friend of Thornton days, Elizabeth Firth, and asked her to marry him; but his request was too late: she was already engaged to the Vicar of Huddersfield. Then he remembered his early sweetheart, Mary Burder of Wethersfield, and wrote seeking permission to come and see her, and covertly implying that he would ask her to marry him since his "ancient love" of nearly fifteen years before was "rekindled". But she rejected his approach in the most unsparing terms. In an astonishing letter she addressed her young lover, Pat, as "Reverend Sir" and expressed her "increased gratitude and thankfulness to that wise, that indulgent Providence which then watched over me for good and withheld me from forming in very early life an indissoluble engagement with one whom I cannot think altogether clear of duplicity. A union with you under then existing circumstances must have embittered my future days. Many communications from you were received in humble silence which ought rather to have met with contempt and indignation, ever considering the nature of a promise. Your confidence I have never betrayed, strange as was the disclosure you once made to me; whether those ardent professions of devoted lasting attachment were sincere is now to me a matter of little consequence."

The meaning behind this letter, what was the young Pat Brontë's duplicity which left so rankling a sore in Mary Burder's heart, and what was the strange disclosure he once made to her, we shall never know now. These are secrets buried beneath the weight of nearly a hundred and fifty years. Nor can we know what were the middle-aged Mr. Brontë's thoughts in his study

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as he laid away the dream which had visited him, and decided that he must endure without marital love for ever.

And Miss Branwell remained. She remained in the parsonage for twenty years till her death in that same upper room where she had nursed her sister. She died in her sister's bed, looking out of the window at the church tower, remembering Maria's death, and thinking that she had done her duty.

Depending on the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost for peace here, and glory and bliss for ever hereafter, I leave this my last Will and Testament: Should I die at Haworth^h, I request that my remains may be deposited in the church in that place as near as convenient to the remains of my dear sister; I moreover will that all my just debts and funeral expenses be paid out of my property, and that my funeral shall be conducted in a moderate and decent manner. My Indian work-box I leave to my niece, Charlotte Brontë: my work-box with a china top I leave to my niece, Emily Jane Brontë, together with my ivory fan; my Japan dressing-box I leave to my nephew, Patrick Branwell Brontë; to my niece Anne Brontë I leave my watch with all that belongs to it; as also my eye-glass and its chain, my rings, silver spoons, books, clothes, etc., etc., I leave to be divided between my above-named three nieces, Charlotte Brontë, Emily Jane Brontë, and Anne Brontë, according as their father shall think proper. And I will that all the money that shall remain . . . shall be put into some safe bank or lent on good landed security, and there left to accumulate for the sole benefit of my four nieces, Charlotte Brontë, Emily Jane Brontë, Anne Brontë, and Elizabeth Jane Kingston. . . .

CHAPTER FOUR

ONE autumn day last year I drove along the old coach road from Keighley to Kendal. For much of the way the road ran along a low mantel above the winding Aire, with the walled fields on either side, the hills beyond, and the moors against the sky. And on the hills and in the valley bottom, their home trees about them, stood the long stone farmhouses of a Yorkshire dale. The road swept over to the other bank of the Aire, and we saw Skipton smoking in the valley head. Above Skipton, by the banks of the Upper Aire, the countryside became softer : it was a terrain now of low meads and fat pastures and wooded parks, with here and there a village or market town in the native stone. Then the scene became wilder, as we went over Giggleswick Scar. There were stone outcrops about us, and tossed hills on our left, and mountains on our right, with the splendid dark head of Ingleborough dominating all. The names had changed. These were fells and scars and ghylls, and we were among the foothills of the Lake District. Yorkshire, with its dales, was falling behind.

Now down on to a more level country, fertile and bosky; and the hills receded. We were very near our destination; and a sentence from *Jane Eyre* kept repeating itself in my head, "The country changed; great grey hills heaved up round the horizon; as twilight deepened we descended a valley, dark with wood, and long after night had overclouded the prospect I heard a wild wind rushing among the trees."

But it was full daylight now, and we could see the road running on towards a hamlet of stone cottages clustered about a bridge. On the far side of the bridge, at right angles to it, and facing the burn, was a single long low block divided apparently into three dwellings; a garden flourished before it, and the wet, green meadows rolled away from it. An A.A. sign on the road's verge told us the name of this quiet village ahead: "Cowan Bridge."

That little low block with its three cottage doors was once



The Parsonage in the 1850s

Showing Charlotte Brontë and
John Brown. *See Appendix I*

The Parsonage now: Same





Woodcut of the Cowan Bridge School
in the days of the Brontës

Cowan Bridge Cottages to-day.



a part of Cowan Bridge School. It was once the Lowood of *Jane Eyre*.

Its situation was a place of some beauty—but the name of the place, to all Brontë lovers, is a name of pain.

Let us tell the story once more with the help of some new documents that have just come to light. In the year 1824 Mr. Brontë either heard from his clerical brethren of a new school for the daughters of poor clergymen or read an advertisement of it in his local paper. We can be sure he obtained a copy of the prospectus, or saw it in the paper, and showed it to Miss Branwell. Three years ago, in 1945, certain faded and fragile manuscripts came into the hands of the Brontë Society, and one of them was a copy of the prospectus. This copy appeared to be in the handwriting of a child, and Mrs. Edith M. Weir, who transcribed it for the Society's *Transactions* and allows me to make use of her labours, has suggested to me that the founder of the School, the Rev. W. Carus Wilson, having to consider every sixpence, set the girls to make copies of the prospectus that he might have some to distribute among the local parsonages. It is obviously a very early prospectus, and possibly the one studied by Mr. Brontë and Miss Branwell. In it the name is spelt "Cowen".

COWEN BRIDGE COLLEGE

Clergymen's daughters are liberally Boarded and clothed, supplied with Books, and carefully instructed by The Rev. W. Wilson and skilful assistants in every department of Classical and Polite Literature, English, French and Italian Languages, Geography (with the use of the Globe), Arithmetic, Music, Fine Needle Work for £14.0.0. per Annum each. N.B. Utmost attention is paid in rendering the students accomplished. The only extras are for instructions in Dancing and Riding—half a guinea per quarter each.

A doctor visits the College regularly once a week. No doctor's Bills. No vacations allowed.

The utmost attention is paid to their Moral and Religious instruction, and due care is taken to inculcate Religious principles, and Habits, as the surest Basis of sound Learning and pious conduct.

Further particulars may be had by applying to The Rev. W. Wilson, Whittington Rectory, or to W. W. Wilson, M.P., Casterton Hall, who will give references to clergymen of the greatest

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Respectability who have placed their daughters under their care at this College.

PROSPECTUS

PATRON — W. W. C. Wilson, M.P.

RECTOR AND THEOLOGICAL LECTURER — Rev. W. Wilson, M.A.

ASSISTANT LECTURERS

In Housekeeping, Domestic Economy — Rev. R. Wilson, M.A.

Elocution, Ventriloquy — Rev. Edward Wilson

Latin, Greek, and Philosophy — Rev. Ian Blythe

Female managing Assistants, Teachers, Head Manager and teacher in Arithmetic and Dress-making — Mrs. W. Wilson

Foreign Languages, Dancing, Riding — Mrs. Ann Wilson

English, Reading, and Poetry — Miss Jane Thompson

Singing and Scougemistress — Miss Finch

Physician — W. Batty, M.D., M.L.H.L.

Chemist, Dentist — Mrs. Batty

Solicitor, Law Agent — John Hartley, Esq.

And these are among the comments that follow:

The object of this Institution may simply be said to afford a comfortable home and all the Blessings of a Pious Liberal and Refined Education to the daughters of necessitous Clergy.

To provide the future success of this Scheme, pecuniary assistance from the pious and Charitable is absolutely necessary.

It is truly painful to reflect how many Poor Clergymen are utterly unable to bestow that on their female offspring to which their rank in Society entitles them.

Such circumstances, together with repeated Solicitations of my father, family and friends, have at length induced me to open a Clerical School, approaching as nigh as possible in resemblance (as to mode of Instruction, Rules, Dress, etc.) to a College. For this purpose I have already engaged professional teachers of more than ordinary talent to assist me in superintending the Education of the Students. Their abilities need no comment from me; they have already distinguished themselves by their accomplishments. I could afford instances of such, but seeing they are members for the most part of my own family, I refrain from motives of delicacy.

Yes, it was very much a family affair; for all the Wilsons tabulated above were near relatives of the founder, the Rev. W.

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Carus Wilson, and Dr. Batty was his brother-in-law. The wits of these libellous times were not above suggesting that with the contributions of the charitable it might prove a lucrative enterprise.

The prospectus must have pleased Mr. Brontë who wished, as his pastoral duties increased, to be relieved of the task of teaching the six children in his study. Maria was now eleven, Elizabeth ten, Charlotte eight, and Emily six—or they were on the eve of those ages. Together the father and aunt made their hapless decision; and Mr. Brontë took Maria and Elizabeth in the coach along the road I have described and left them in the school. He surrendered them to the care of a Miss Evans, now the senior mistress, and, presumably, to the discipline of the Scourgemistress—how the age comes before us in that solitary word!

In August Charlotte followed them; and in November Emily. That was a fatal moment for the school when Charlotte passed in at its door. One fancies that in the trees about the house the rooks must have croaked the fatal entrance of Charlotte, aged eight, under the battlements. She came bringing it a gift of clouded fame. And yet all the time she was there, even while Miss Evans was making a strong impression upon her so that she portrayed her in *Jane Eyre* as the compassionate and saintly Miss Temple, she herself made hardly any impression upon Miss Evans—even less than the beautiful little Emily made; as we see from a single sentence in a letter of Miss Evans' to Mrs. Gaskell: “Of the two younger ones—if two there were—I have very slight recollections, save that one, a darling child, under five years of age, was quite the pet nursling of the school.” Very slight indeed, the recollection; for Emily was not under five but over six.

It is believed that Charlotte, and later Emily, travelled in the coach alone; and that was why, as I took the same road, I was thinking of Emily and the anxiety and sick apprehension in her heart as she looked from the coach window and saw the Yorkshire dales falling behind. If at sixteen she suffered when taken away from her home and the moors, what did she endure in coach and schoolroom as a child of six?

Every reader of *Jane Eyre*, believing that the Lowood Orphan

Asylum in that tale is a faithful reproduction of Cowan Bridge, and Mr. Brocklehurst an exact likeness of Mr. Carus Wilson, has a misty impression of the school as an institution where the girls were hungry and cold and beaten; the while they were sternly humiliated by a "black marble clergyman" who lectured them on the need for subservience and frightened them with the wrath of God; all this forlorn unhappiness being set in a tenement so low-lying and damp that many sickened and some died.

What is the truth? First the cold facts of the Brontës' story. In the early months of 1825 a fever of some kind broke out in the school—certainly not "typhus", as is said in *Jane Eyre*, for only one died at the school and typhus must have claimed many more victims. Mr. Carus Wilson, much distressed, did all that he could to stay this threat to the children whom, in his own fashion, he loved, and to his school of which he was proud. In February Maria sickened and drooped but her complaint was not the "low fever"; indeed it seemed to have developed before the fever. It was consumption. Mr. Brontë was immediately summoned, and he came and took her away; all the girls, including Elizabeth, Charlotte, and Emily, crowding out on to the roadside by the bridge, in their purple frocks, brown holland pinafores and heavy black shoes, to watch the drama of father and sick child driving away. The three younger children remained at Cowan Bridge, so it is clear that at this time Mr. Brontë was attaching no blame to the school.

Spring brightened over the little hamlet and the surrounding fields, and Maria's sisters were happy; very happy because the sickness in the school had driven them out into the sunshine to play. Sometimes they played in the school garden, where the senior girls had small, square plots of their own, and their flowers sprang willingly from the fat, moist earth. (Even when I was there in late October the roses and dahlias made a brilliant showing in the place where Emily used to romp, the pet of the school, and Charlotte would occasionally rise from her gardening to listen to the traffic on the turnpike road.) Sometimes they took their dinner into the woods and picnicked there. But Charlotte's favourite pastime was to play in the beck that came chuckling under the bridge and below the school garden. She would wander with a friend from stone to stone, and from boulder to boulder,

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between the alders and the gorse that fringed the amber stream, and beneath the high feathery ashes that overhung it. They came to a chosen place where a smooth rock stood in the very midst of the water ; and, baring their feet, they waded through the eddies to it and sat there together, telling each other tales or just watching the stream run by.

So a lovely April passed over Cowan Bridge to be followed by a lovelier May ; and in the first week of that month, perhaps while Charlotte was at play in the back, Maria died far away in Haworth. Only Branwell and Anne were at home when she died. Anne was only five ; but I think we may picture the seven-year-old boy being taken by his father and aunt to look his last upon his sister ; because, some years afterwards, he wrote a poem called *Caroline* under which name he concealed Maria ; and in it are the lines :

My father's stern eye dropt a tear
Upon the coffin resting there.
My mother lifted me to see
What might within that coffin be ;
And to this moment I can feel
The voiceless gasp—the sickening chill—
With which I hid my whitened face
In the dear folds of her embrace. . . .

There lay she then, as now she lies—
For not a limb has moved since then—
In dreamless slumber closed, those eyes
That nevermore might wake again.
She lay as I had seen her lie
On many a happy night before
When I was humbly kneeling by
Whom she was teaching to adore.

Scarcely had she been carried through the Gate of the Dead at the garden's foot and laid with her mother beneath the church pavement when the authorities at Cowan Bridge reported that Elizabeth was seriously ill too, her symptoms the same as Maria's, and hurried her home in the care of a Mrs. Hardacre. The bill for that urgent message and hurried journey is still to be seen in the account book of the school :

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Elizabeth's fare home, guard and coachman	..	13.	0.
Mrs. Hardacre's fare	..	18.	0.
Horse, gig, pikes and men	..	2.	0.
Mrs. Hardacre's bed at Keighley	..	1.	0.
2 letters	..	1.	4½.

That was on the 31st of May, and Mr. Brontë, now desperately afraid, ran to get Charlotte and Emily. Mr. Carus Wilson had just taken them to his seaside home at Silverdale, Morecambe Bay, and it was from there that Mr. Brontë snatched them away. One thinks of their arrival at the parsonage to find that Maria was not there. One thinks of their whispering together, those four children: Charlotte nine, Branwell nearly eight, Emily nearly seven, and Anne five. One imagines their silence and their wide-eyed wonder as they stared at their speechless father. For the second time the protection of a mother (Maria being hardly less) was removed from them; and they were without shelter. What did they think as they listened to the sounds in Elizabeth's sick-room and felt the alarm in the house? After fourteen days Elizabeth was carried to the vault where her mother and Maria lay, and possibly the children followed behind her coffin.

§

Mr. Carus Wilson's school for the daughters of clergymen was removed in 1832 to Casterton, where it is now: a fine and famous school, and the mother of similar foundations in other parts of England. No longer by the beckside at Cowan Bridge, it has a spacious home with accommodation for over two hundred pupils and twelve tennis courts; its buildings standing in one of the most healthy and beautiful spots in Westmorland, in the vale of the Lune, three hundred feet above sea level and close to the fells. Every year its pupils honour the memory of their founder on the anniversary of his birthday. The registers of its first days are still to be seen; and it is fascinating to read:

"Maria Brontë, aged 10½ (daughter of Patrick Brontë, Haworth, near Keighley, Yorks), July 21st, 1824: Reads tolerably. Writes pretty well. Ciphers a little. Works very badly. Knows a little grammar, geography and history. Has made some progress in reading French, but knows nothing of the language

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grammatically. Left February 14th, 1825, in ill-health, and died May 6, 1825."

"Elizabeth Brontë, aged 9. (Vaccinated. Scarlet fever. Whooping cough.) Reads little. Writes pretty well. Works very badly. Knows nothing else. Left in ill-health, May 31st, 1825. Died June 15, 1825, in decline."

"Charlotte Brontë. Entered school August 10, 1824. Writes indifferently. Ciphers a little and works neatly. Knows nothing of grammar, geography, history, or accomplishments. Altogether clever for her age, but knows nothing systematically. Left school June 1, 1825. Governess."

"Emily Brontë. Entered Nov. 25, 1824, aged 5 $\frac{3}{4}$. Reads very prettily and works a little. Left June 1, 1825. Subsequent career, governess."

The registers also reveal the panic of 1825. Twenty-eight out of seventy-seven children in that year were taken away. You can read in Miss Evans' handwriting how three, and these included Maria and Elizabeth, left school in ill-health and died in a decline, how one died at the school; how one left in good health but died of "typhus fever" later; how the twenty-three others either "left in ill-health", or just "left". Among those who just "left" were Charlotte and Emily. The panic among the parents is there among the old documents for all to see.

The truth of it all Charlotte stated in a phrase. Writing in 1848, when asked if she could now recommend the school, she said, "My experience of that institution is very much out of date, being derived from the experience of twenty years ago: the establishment was at that time in its infancy, and a sad, rickety infancy it was." A sad, rickety infancy it was; but as often happens, both with institutions and with men, the rickety infancy, once corrected, was succeeded by a fine maturity. The school started badly, its founder and parent, like many another parent, being as inexpert and mistaken in the management of his child as he was filled with high ambitions for it. The site was unsuitable; the buildings were inadequate; the first cook was unscrupulous; and the religious instruction was so scrupulous as to be dreadful. The character of the instruction given by the Rector and Theological Lecturer, Mr. Carus Wilson, can be ascertained, not so much from *Jane Eyre* as from the poems

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contributed by Mr. Wilson to his own magazine, *The Children's Friend*, one verse of which runs:

It's dangerous to provoke a God
Whose power and vengeance none can tell;
One stroke of His almighty rod
Can send young sinners quick to hell.

—But that his intentions were of the loftiest; that he loved children in his own righteous and disastrous way and longed to help and save them; that Mr. Brocklehurst, the black marble clergyman in *Jane Eyre*, is a grotesque effigy, giving only one aspect of the man—all this seems proved by the facts that he founded the school at all; that he gave generously to it out of his own means; that he rushed a nurse to it when he heard of the epidemic; that he immediately dismissed the cook when he learned of her negligences; that he took some of the children to his house by the sea; that Miss Evans, a humane and gentle woman, stayed at the school for some years and afterwards spoke in the highest terms of him and of his love for the pupils, and of their love for him; and that, when he died, the Bishop of Rochester, in an obituary notice, set forth his manifold good works. "He had the singular felicity of improving, if not anticipating, in his various plans of benevolence, the leading ideas of his age, and his name has long been a household word in every Christian family. In church building, in the diffusion of cheap Christian literature, and in education, his exertions for half a century have earned him the blessings of rich and poor."

A better man than many; but it was his misfortune that while he was lecturing to his girls at Cowan Bridge on the need for righteousness if they were not to perish everlasting, there was among them a child of eight, but so small as to look no more than five, who was listening. Why did not the Spirit of the Future touch him on the arm and whisper:

A chiel's among you takin' notes,
And, faith, he'll prent it!

For the Bishop might write what he liked, but he had no power against the child. His words perished the day after they were

published, but the black marble clergyman which the child created endures like a monument.

There is a tradition in the Heger family that Charlotte, when she left Brussels after a quarrel with Madame Heger, was heard to murmur, "*Je me vengerai.*" Whether or not it is a fable, a sprightly weed that might well have arisen from the acid soil of *Villette*, it is true in its essence to something in Charlotte. All her life she lashed many of those whom she supposed to have oppressed or injured or slighted her or her sisters: a scourgemistress with a whip of barbed words. She carved her effigies in blacks and whites, according as she hated the originals or loved them; and Mr. Carus Wilson was for the black marble. Rarely could she be dispassionate and objective, and then only where she loved. She might pretend to some dismay when she heard that her Lowood Asylum was being regarded as a true picture of Cowan Bridge, but really she was glad of it; glad that Mr. Wilson was feeling the cane. "I suffered to see my sisters perish-ing," she wrote in one letter; and in another, "*Jane Eyre* has got down into Yorkshire, a copy has even penetrated to this neighbourhood. I saw an elderly clergyman reading it the other day, and had the satisfaction of hearing him exclaim, 'Why, they have got — School, and Mr. — here, I declare! and Miss —' (naming the originals of Lowood, Mr. Brocklehurst and Miss Temple). He had known them all. I wondered whether he would recognise the portraits, and was gratified to find that he did, and that, moreover, he pronounced them faithful and just. He said, too, that Mr. — (Brocklehurst) 'deserved all the chastisement he had got'."

This is glee: a grim, tight-lipped exultation. Maria and Elizabeth, and Charlotte too, were avenged.

Je me vengerai.

CHAPTER FIVE

FOR five years the children remained at home, while Charlotte, the eldest, grew from nine to fourteen, and Anne, the youngest, from five to ten. Charlotte was now their shepherdess, substitute mother, and general manager; and what she lacked of Maria's gentleness she made up in efficiency. One is always efficient in an activity one enjoys. In the morning the girls did their lessons in the bedroom-schoolroom of Aunt Branwell, and Branwell did his in Mr. Brontë's study: Mr. Brontë, we remember, had been a schoolmaster in Ireland. In the afternoons they were either all free or the girls did sewing and embroidering under the eye of their aunt. It is in their free hours that we shall best see the future sprouting.

In these unregarded hours they played or read avidly or wrote books. The games were played in the garden, on the moors, in their little box-room "study", or in the kitchen. In the kitchen? Why, yes; very often in the kitchen; for now a new figure sat there in a rocking-chair by the fire; one whom they learned to love as they never loved Aunt Branwell. Tabitha Aykroyd was over fifty when she came to the Haworth kitchen, and she stayed there for thirty years, dying a few weeks before Charlotte, the last of the children, at the age of eighty-four. She was a working woman of the village: an admirable old grapefruit of a woman with a tough rind, much pith within the rind, and a mass of softness within the pith—a softness, however, which was likely to be tart if not kept sweet.

It will have been observed that the present writer feels little affection for those who regard every character in a Brontë novel as a careful portrait of a real-life character; but there can be no doubt that Tabitha figures in *Jane Eyre*, with the Haworth kitchen around her. Jane is describing what she saw as she peeped through a window into the kitchen of Moor House: "I could see clearly a room with a sanded floor, clean scoured; a dresser of walnut, with pewter plates ranged in rows, reflecting the redness and radiance of a glowing peat fire. I could see a clock, a white deal table, some chairs. The candle, whose ray had

been my beacon, burnt on the table; and by its light an elderly woman, somewhat rough-looking, but scrupulously clean, like all about her, was knitting a stocking. . . . So hushed was it, I could hear the cinders fall from the grate, the clock tick in its obscure corner; and I even fancied I could distinguish the click-click of the woman's knitting-needles."

Two "young graceful women-ladies in every point" and very reminiscent of Emily and Anne, are sitting there with the old servant, reading, and one of them quotes from her German book. "Ich wäge die Gedanken in der Schale meines Zornes und die Werke mit dem Gewichte meines Grimms."

"Is there ony country where they talk in that way?" asked the old woman, looking up from her knitting.

"Yes, Hannah—a far larger country than England; where they talk in no other way."

"Well, for sure case, I knawn't how they can understand t'one t'other: and if either o' ye went there, ye could tell what they said, I guess."

"We could probably tell something of what they said, but not all—for we are not as clever as you think us, Hannah. We don't speak German, and we cannot read it without a dictionary to help us."

"And what good does it do you?"

"We mean to teach it sometime—or at least the elements, as they say; and then we shall get more money than we do now."

"Varry like: but give ower studying; ye've done enough for tonight."

When Tabitha's work was done, her cooking, washing, cleaning, and sweeping (and we know that Emily, aged eleven, liked to help with the sweeping), she would let the "bairns" assemble round her rocking-chair and tell them stories—picturesque tales of the days when the packhorses used to come up Haworth street, with tinkling bells and gaily caparisoned, carrying the produce of Yorkshire over the hills to Lancashire; mysterious tales of the fairies in the bottom, and of her friends who had seen them by the beck on moonlight nights; and exciting, rather frightening tales, in her plain, direct unmitigated Yorkshire terms, of the ruthless deeds and terrible deaths of the

old decayed gentry in their farmhouses or manors on the moor—and all the time Emily sat listening.

But this is but a picture seen in the half-light: imagination can give us no more. Luckily we have a picture from an eye-witness, Charlotte, written when she was thirteen; and in this the focus is perfect, the definition brilliant.

“One night about the time when the cold sleet and stormy fogs of November are succeeded by the snow-storms, and high piercing night winds of confirmed winter, we were all sitting round the warm blazing kitchen fire, having just concluded a quarrel with Tabby concerning the propriety of lighting a candle, from which she came off victorious, no candle having been produced. A long pause succeeded, which was at last broken by Branwell saying, in a lazy manner, ‘I don’t know what to do.’

This was echoed by Emily and Anne.

“*Tabby*. ‘Wha ya may go t’bed.’

“*Branwell*. ‘I’d rather do anything than that.’

“*Charlotte*. ‘Why are you so glum tonight, Tabby? Oh! suppose we each had an island of our own.’

“*Branwell*. ‘If we had I would choose the Island of Man.’

“*Charlotte*. ‘And I would choose the Isle of Wight.’

“*Emily*. ‘The Isle of Arran for me.’

“*Anne*. ‘And mine shall be Guernsey.’

“We then chose who should be the chief men in our islands. Branwell chose John Bull, Astley Cooper and Leigh Hunt; Emily, Walter Scott, Mr. Lockhart, Johnny Lockhart; Anne, Michael Sadler, Lord Bentinck, Sir Henry Halford. I chose the Duke of Wellington and two sons, Christopher North and Co., and Mr. Abernethy. Here our conversation was interrupted by the, to us, dismal sound of the clock striking seven, and we were summoned off to bed.”

The “Islanders” was but one of their “plays” or make-believe games. “Our plays,” writes Charlotte in her *History of the Year 1829*, “were established: ‘Young Men’, June 1826; ‘Our Fellows’, July, 1827; ‘Islanders’, December, 1827. These are our three great plays, that are not kept secret. Emily’s and my best plays were established the 1st of December, 1827; the others, March, 1828. Best plays mean secret plays; they are very nice ones. All our plays are very strange ones.”

Indeed so; for sometimes they put such power and passion into their kitchen dramas that even the tough-rinded but simple Tabby was shaken. Once, Francis Leyland tells us, they so wrought on her fears that she fled from the stage to her nephew's house and, as soon as she could regain her breath, exclaimed, "William! yah mun gooa up to Mr. Brontë's, for aw'm sure yon childer's all gooin' mad, and aw darn't stop 'ith hause cu' longer wi' em; and aw'll stay here woll yah come back." William, no doubt pleased with the alarm and his masculine mission, hastened up to the parsonage, but when he arrived "the children only set up a great crack o' laughing" at the joke they had played on Tabby.

These are the games of all children; but it is fair to suggest that the games of the Brontës were informed by a more than normal creative power.

If they were not playing they were reading, Charlotte, very shortsighted, bending low over her book or holding it close to her eyes. In the kitchen or the box-room study they fed and fertilised their minds with the *Imitation of Christ*, their mother's copy; the books from their father's shelves, theological and medical; some "mad Methodist magazines, full of miracles and apparitions and praeternatural warnings", brought by their mother from Cornwall; the journals of the day (here again the child Charlotte, that indefatigable chronicler, is our authority: "We take the *Leeds Intelligencer*, Tory, and the *Leeds Mercury*, Whig, edited by Mr. Baines and his brother, son-in-law, and his two sons, Edward and Talbot. We see the *John Bull*; it is a high Tory, very violent. Mr. Driver lends us it, as likewise *Blackwood's Magazine*, the most able periodical there is."); and the poets and the *Lives of the Poets*.

We are secure in this last assertion, because Charlotte wrote a few years later to her schoolfellow, Ellen Nussey, when she had taken on the management of Ellen's life: "If you like poetry, let it be first-rate; Milton, Shakespeare, Thomson, Goldsmith, Pope (if you will, though I don't admire him), Scott, Byron, Campbell, Wordsworth and Southey. Now don't be startled at the names of Shakespeare and Byron. . . . You will know how to choose the good and avoid the evil; the finest passages are always the purest, the bad are invariably revolting.

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... For fiction, read Scott alone ; all novels after his are worthless. For biography, read Johnson's *Lives of the Poets*, Boswell's *Life of Johnson*, Southey's *Life of Nelson*"—and the list continues.

And of course this reading of poetry and of the lives of authors led to their "commencing author" themselves. The doomed cannot read such things without hearing a voice, "Go and do thou likewise," and feeling the live coal on their lips. The exigent and harassing demon was now within them all. They were writing.

Like the ships of the *Iliad*, Charlotte's books of this period need only that their names should be set forth, and we see the majestic array. And this order of battle is easily given for she has provided a *Catalog of My Books, with the Period of their Completion, up to August 3rd, 1830*, when she was fourteen. It is impossible to name the whole muster, in these days of scarce paper and shortage of labour at the printing works, but here are some of the titles, *The Search after Happiness, a Tale* ; *The Adventures of Edward de Crack, a Tale* ; *The Adventures of Ernest Alembert, a Tale* ; *An Interesting Incident in the Lives of Some of the Most Eminent Persons of the Age* ; *Tales of the Islanders* ; *Characters of Great Men of the Present Age* ; *The Young Men's Magazines in Six Numbers* ; *The Poetaster, a Drama in Two Volumes* ; *Meditations while Journeying in a Canadian Forest* ; *The Marquis of Douro and Lord Charles Wellesley's Tale* (many of these works were by one or other, or both, of the Duke of Wellington's sons, since Charlotte in imagination was one or other, or both, of them—generally she was Lord Charles Albert Florian Wellesley; as who wouldn't be if they could?) ; *Lord C. Wellesley's Tale to his Brother* ; *Descriptions of the Duke of Wellington's Palace on the Pleasant Banks of the Lusiva* ; *A Thing of Fourteen Lines* ; *Lines written on seeing the Garden of a Genius*—at which point we will diverge from the terrifying list to state that Charlotte was now much interested in Geniuses. More than interested : she was resolved, to be of their company; which resolution, if held with the bull-dog grip of Charlotte, is itself no small source of genius. One of her works at this time is *Reflections on the Fate of a Neglected Genius* ; and another *Blackwood's Young Men's Magazines, Edited by the Genius C.B. Printed by Captain Tree, and sold by Captain Cory.*

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This is happiness. Death might have come too close and too soon to these children; their mother and Maria and Elizabeth might be sleeping in the church; but this ceaseless creative activity in the parsonage above the church was happiness and fun.

Mrs. Gaskell in her *Life* reproduced a facsimile of a page from one of Charlotte's works, printed in her minute hand-print, but as no one has ever been able to read this reproduction, even with a magnifying glass, here at least is its opening:

THE SECRET

Chapter I

A dead silence had reigned in the Home Office of Verdopolis for three hours in the morning of a fine summer's day, interrupted only by such sounds as the scraping of a penknife, the dropping of a ruler, or an occasional cough; or, whispered now and then, some brief mandate, uttered by the noble first secretary, in his commanding tones. At length that sublime personage, after completing some score or so of despatches, addressing a small slightly-built young gentleman who occupied the chief situation among the clerks, said:

"Mr. Rymer, will you be good enough to tell me what o'clock it is?"

"Certainly, my lord!" was the prompt reply as, springing from his seat, the ready underling, instead of consulting his watch like other people, hastened to the window in order to mark the sun's situation; having made his observation, he answered: " 'Tis twelve precisely, my lord."

"Very well," said the marquis. "You may all give up then, and see that all your desks are locked, so that not a scrap of paper is left to litter the office. Mr. Rymer, I shall expect you to take care that my directions are fulfilled." So saying, he assumed his hat and gloves, and with a stately tread was approaching the vestibule, when a slight bustle and whispering among the clerks arrested his steps.

"What is the matter?" asked he, turning round. "I hope these are not sounds of contention I hear!"

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They wrote in their "study", the cell-like box-room over the front hall; and as I write this I think how powerful a factor in their lives was their father. It is not only that he, like Tabby, was a *raconteur* to whom they loved to listen; telling them tales of splendid fights in his native Ireland, of violent vendettas among the moorland families (he had a certain relish for violence) and of mill-battles and sudden murders in the Luddite riots, which he himself had witnessed; it is not only that, in the catchment area which gave us the stormy torrent of *Wuthering Heights* and the full, broad stream of *Shirley*, he was the loftiest peak and principal watershed; it is also that in the formative years of his children he was so palpably their model. He had a study; they had a study. He had written poems, and printed and published them; they wrote poems; and printed and bound and published them too, as all may see who examine the inch-square volumes in the Haworth Museum. He wrote a novel, *The Maid of Killarney, a Modern Tale; in which are interwoven some cursory remarks on Religion and Politics*; they wrote novels, in which were interwoven some cursory remarks on religion and politics.

There was silence in the box-room as they wrote, sitting on the beds or on the floor; silence in that coop of teeming children; a silence at which, perhaps, Aunt Branwell and Mr. Brontë and Tabitha wondered, and at which the world has wondered ever since. That stone house on the top of the hill and the edge of the world, after half a century of quiet and commonplace life, was now on fire. A divine fire had come down and settled in it.



Roe Head to-day



The Schoolgirls' Wicket Gate at Roe Head



Oakwell Hall, the "Fieldhead" of *Shirley*

CHAPTER SIX

AT the end of 1830, Charlotte being nearly fifteen, Mr. Brontë and Miss Branwell decided that she should go to school again for a little; and we can imagine the hidden fear which gripped her heart as she remembered Cowan Bridge. No doubt she imagined low-ceiled passages with stone-flagged floors, chilly dormitories, and a cold bare schoolroom crowded with strange and noisy girls among whom, as always among strangers, her head would ache with shyness and malaise. No doubt she wondered if they would make fun of her because she was so ridiculously small for her age, so shortsighted, and so "ugly". She may even have wondered if there was a scourgemistress. Perhaps she asked a few anxious questions and was somewhat comforted when Aunt Branwell told her that there were only eight other pupils at Roe Head; that they were girls from the best houses of the neighbourhood; that the Principal, Miss Wooler, was a kind and motherly person; and that the whole atmosphere of the place was that of a family rather than of a school. Thereafter she probably said very little; and the January morning came when, keeping her own thoughts, she got into the covered cart which was to take her the twenty miles to Roe Head. She sat there alone, under the hood, as it jolted over the heights and round the shoulders of the moors and down into the green Calder valley.

And the house it came to was as different from the cold stone buildings at Cowan Bridge as any two school-houses could be. This was a tall, handsome house, three stories high, with large bay windows from ground to cornice, and a drive sweeping up to its door between fine trees and wide lawns. It stood on a slope, and the view from its bow windows was an extended panorama of meadow and parkland, leafy vale and long wooded hills.

As she got out of the cart Miss Wooler came to meet her—while somewhere near at hand a girl stood watching. This was Mary Taylor, who was to become one of her two life-long friends. "I first saw her coming out of a covered cart, in very old-fashioned

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clothes, and looking very cold and miserable," Mary has told us. "She was coming to school at Miss Wooler's. She looked a little old woman, so shortsighted that she always appeared to be seeking something and moving her head from side to side to catch a sight of it. She was very ugly and nervous and spoke with a strong Irish accent."

Miss Wooler, issuing forth to welcome her, must have been a comforting sight; a stout little woman, dressed in a well-fitting frock, and looking like a lady abbess; her hair plaited and formed in a coronet round her head, from which long large ringlets fell to her shoulders; her movements graceful and dignified and her voice very sweet. (The description is Ellen Nussey's.) From the records it would appear that the new pupil went upstairs and changed her dress and was then shown into the schoolroom and left there alone for a while. And, as was her habit all her life when sad (and Jane Eyre's habit too), she went to a window-seat and, sitting there, gazed out at the garden. And as she sat there, maybe thinking of the living-room at the parsonage and the view from the window-seat there, another new girl was shown into the room. Here is Ellen Nussey at last, the other of her two life-long friends; and here is Ellen's story of that meeting.

"Arriving at school about a week after the general assembly of the pupils, I was not expected to accompany them when the time came for their daily exercise, but while they were out I was led into the schoolroom and quietly left to make my observations. I had come to the conclusion that it was very nice and comfortable for a schoolroom, when, turning to the window to observe the look-out, I became aware for the first time that I was not alone; there was a silent, weeping, dark little figure in the large bay window; she must, I thought, have risen from the floor. As soon as I had recovered from my surprise I went to the far end of the room where the bookshelves were, the contents of which I must have contemplated with a little awe in anticipation of coming studies. A crimson cloth covered the long table down the centre of the room which helped, no doubt, to hide the shrinking little figure from my view. I was touched and troubled at once to see her so sad and so tearful. . . .

"She never seemed to me the unattractive little person others designated her, but certainly she was at this time anything but

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pretty; even her good points were lost. Her naturally beautiful hair of soft, silky brown being then dry and frizzy-looking, screwed up in tight little curls, showing features that were all the plainer from her exceeding thinness and want of complexion, she looked 'dried in'. A dark, rusty, green stuff dress of old-fashioned make detracted still more from her appearance."

Charlotte was homesick for the first few days. Even the nicest girls, even girls from the best houses, can be brutal in their frankness and thoughtless derision, and they laughed, as she had expected, at her exceeding smallness, her big nose, her big crooked mouth, and her old-fashioned clothes. Mary Taylor even told her she was "very ugly"—was ever a lifelong friendship raised on an unlikelier base? They laughed at her ignorance of grammar and geography and at her "feebleness" at games. But had she wanted to take part in the garden ball-games, her short sight would have incapacitated her, so she stood apart or sat apart under the trees while they played and sometimes laughed at her. They did not know that she was an author and the son of a duke. The present owner of Roe Head, which has been enlarged of recent years into a fine mansion, showed me the old pear tree under which she is reputed to have sat, and the wicket in the wall nearby which was the pupils' entrance when they came back from a walk, and where, accordingly, Charlotte must often have guided Emily into school, when she at a later date was a teacher at Roe Head and Emily a pupil.

To Mary Taylor we owe one memory which reveals all too clearly the nature of Charlotte's thoughts in these first days. She liked, Mary says, to talk of her two elder sisters, Maria and Elizabeth, who had been taken ill at Cowan Bridge and died so quickly; and she would describe them in such terms that Mary concluded they must have been "wonders of talent and kindness". And one morning, as they rose from their beds, she told Mary she'd been dreaming of them. She had dreamed she was summoned to the Roe Head drawing-room, where she was "wanted", and on entering the room, behold, the visitors were Maria and Elizabeth; but—and here is the suffering in the dream—"they were changed; they had forgotten what they

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used to care for. They were very fashionably dressed and began criticising the room."

Still, of Roe Head and Miss Wooler there is little, thank God, but good to tell; and Charlotte, after the homesickness had passed, was happy there. She was happy because now, instead of being laughed at, she was being admired: admired for her great and unnatural knowledge of poetry, art, politics, and the Bible, and for the fact, of which she had now apprised them, that she was a poet, novelist, and magazine editor. She could give much better than she got in any argument on these topics. "Someone at school said she was always talking about clever people: Johnson, Sheridan, etc. She said, 'Now you don't know the meaning of "clever"; Sheridan might be clever; yes, Sheridan was clever—scamps often are; but Johnson hadn't a spark of cleverality in him.' "

It is easy to deduce from this that she had some belief in her own cleverality; and it must have been an important moment in her career, strengthening weak hands and confirming feeble knees, when all her schoolfellows proclaimed it. No one in their view approached Charlotte Brontë in the art of the bed-time story. As soon as they were under the bedclothes they would demand of her a story; especially would they importune her for what a small boy, not unknown to myself, calls an afraiding story. And she had a hundred such stories—were they not all written and printed and stitched and bound at home? —she had all the power and passion with which to enact their more horrible parts—remember Tabby; and one evening she was so successful in her narration that a scream brought Miss Wooler running up the stairs, to find that "one of the listeners had been seized with violent palpitations".

No better publicity for a story than a scandal like this, and one immediately longs to be told this remarkable tale—her first great popular success, a sensation in its day, and therefore the predecessor of *Jane Eyre*. Ellen Nussey has suggested that it was about a somnambulist. "She brought together all the horrors her imagination could create, from surging seas, raging breakers, towering castle walls, high precipices, invisible chasms and dangers. Having wrought these materials to the highest pitch of effect, she brought out in almost cloud-height her somnambu-

list, walking on shaking turrets—all told in a voice that conveyed more than words alone can express." I think it just possible that the gothic and appalling tale was *An Adventure in Ireland*, written by her two years before. Let us then brace ourselves to hear it. It opens with the narrator, a gentleman, wandering among the mountains of Ireland and coming suddenly upon a fine old castle built upon a rock. There follows some picturesque scenic description, such as Charlotte loved, but we will skip all this and come to the horrors. A stranger, a gentleman, approaches the narrator and invites him to spend the night in the castle. He is unwise enough to accept.

"When we arrived at the castle I was shown into a large parlour, in which was an old lady sitting in an arm-chair by the fireside, knitting. On the rug lay a very pretty tortoiseshell cat. As soon as mentioned, the old lady rose; and when Mr. O'Callaghan (for that, I learned, was his name) told her who I was, she said in the most cordial tone that I was welcome, and asked me to sit down. In the course of conversation I learned that she was Mr. O'Callaghan's mother, and that his father had been dead about a year. We had sat about an hour, when supper was announced, and after supper Mr. O'Callaghan asked me if I should like to retire for the night. I answered in the affirmative, and a little boy was commissioned to show me to my apartment. It was a snug, clean, and comfortable little old-fashioned room at the top of the castle. As soon as we had entered, the boy, who appeared to be a shrewd, good-tempered little fellow, said with a shrug of the shoulder, 'If it was goin' to bed I was, it shouldn't be here that you'd catch me.' 'Why?' said I. 'Because,' replied the boy, 'they say that the ould masther's ghost has been seen sitting on that there chair.' 'And have you seen him?' 'No; but I've heard him washing his hands in that basin often and often.' 'What is your name, my little fellow?' 'Dennis Mulready, please your honour.' 'Well, good night to you.' 'Good night, masther; and may the saints keep you from all fairies and brownies,' said Dennis as he left the room.

"As soon as I had laid down I began to think of what the boy had been telling me, and I confess I felt a strange kind of fear, and once or twice I even thought I could discern something

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white through the darkness which surrounded me. At length, by the help of reason, I succeeded in mastering these, what some would call idle fancies, and fell asleep. I had slept about an hour when a strange sound awoke me, and I saw looking through my curtains a skeleton wrapped in a white sheet. I was overcome with terror and tried to scream, but my tongue was paralysed and my whole frame shook with fear. In a deep hollow voice it said to me, 'Arise, that I may show thee this world's wonders,' and in an instant I found myself encompassed with clouds and darkness. But soon the roar of mighty waters fell upon my ear, and I saw some clouds of spray arising from high falls that rolled in awful majesty down tremendous precipices, and then foamed and thundered in the gulf beneath as if they had taken up their unquiet abode in some giant's cauldron. But soon the scene changed, and I found myself in the mines of Cracone. There were high pillars and stately arches, whose glittering splendour was never excelled by the brightest fairy palaces. There were not many lamps, only those of a few poor miners, whose rough visages formed a striking contrast to the dazzling figures and grandeur which surrounded them. But in the midst of all this magnificence I felt an indescribable sense of fear and terror, for the sea raged above us, and by the awful and tumultuous noises of roaring winds and dashing waves it seemed as if the storm was violent. And now the mossy pillars groaned beneath the pressure of the ocean, and the glittering arches seemed about to be overwhelmed. When I heard the rushing water, and saw a mighty flood rolling towards me I gave a loud shriek of terror. The scene vanished, and I found myself in a wide desert full of barren rocks and high mountains. As I was approaching one of the rocks, in which there was a large cave, my foot stumbled and I fell. Just then I heard a deep growl, and saw by the unearthly light of his own fiery eyes a royal lion rousing himself from his kingly slumbers. . . ."

After which there were no slumbers, kingly or queenly, for Charlotte's listeners for a while.

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A happy incident, and one that plays a pleasant light on Branwell, occurred towards the end of her eighteen months at Roe Head. Of the four Brontë children at this time Charlotte and Branwell were banded together in one team, and Emily and Anne in another; and on a May day Branwell, then fifteen, walked all the twenty miles over the hills and moors to visit Charlotte in her school. She was obviously touched by this visit and wrote him a letter that gives us, in a single view, her interests at fifteen, her attachment to Branwell, her current idea of an elegant prose, and her sly fun.

“DEAR BRANWELL—As usual I address my weekly letter to you, because to you I find the most to say. I feel exceedingly anxious to know how and in what state you arrived at home after your long and (I should think) very fatiguing journey. I could perceive when you arrived at Roe Head that you were very much tired, though you refused to acknowledge it. After you were gone, many questions and subjects of conversation recurred to me which I had intended to mention to you, but quite forgot them in the agitation which I felt at the totally unexpected pleasure of seeing you. Lately I had begun to think that I had lost all the interest which I used formerly to take in politics, but the extreme pleasure I felt at the news of the Reform Bill’s being thrown out by the House of Lords, and of the expulsion or resignation of Earl Grey, etc., etc., convinced me that I have not as yet lost *all* my penchant for politics. I am extremely glad that Aunt has consented to take in *Fraser’s Magazine*, for though I know from your description of its general contents it will be rather uninteresting when compared with *Blackwood*, still it will be better than remaining the whole year without being able to obtain a sight of any periodical publication whatever; and such would assuredly be our case, as in the little wild, moorland village where we reside there would be no possibility of borrowing or obtaining a work of that description from a circulating library. I hope with you that the present delightful weather may contribute to the perfect restoration of our dear papa’s health, and that it may give

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Aunt pleasant reminiscences of the salubrious climate of her native place."

If Charlotte took little part in the school games she enjoyed the long walks which the girls would take with Miss Wooler in the lovely country around Roe Head. The quiet fields and roads which twenty years before had been mere pasture and unstoried highways were now full of local history; the legends lay upon them like the still but quickening air of haunted places. It was just twenty years since the Luddite rising, when the mill-hands of these parts rose against the new machines that would take, as they imagined, the bread out of their mouths; and Miss Wooler would tell the girls as they passed field or factory or solitary house of violent happenings there; events of which she had heard the bruit, or indeed the actual sounds—footsteps and voices—when she was young.

"She remembered the times," says Mrs. Gaskell, "when watchers or wakers in the night heard the distant word of command and the measured tramp of thousands of sad, desperate men receiving a surreptitious military training in preparation for some great day."

Miss Wooler told the stories well, for this gentle little spinster loved a tale of violence, as who does not?—and the girls crowded to her side to listen as they walked on; Charlotte probably the most entranced of all. One pictures the stout little mistress and her seven or eight girls, delicately nurtured in the best houses, coming out of the school gate and turning southward, and Miss Wooler pointing to the sloping field below her garden. In that meadow on an April night the Luddites were armed by their leaders with pistols and hatchets for the attack on Cartwright's Mill. "The silent, sullen multitude marched in the dead of that spring night"—Mrs. Gaskell enjoys the relation as much as Miss Wooler—"to Rawfolds (Mr. Cartwright's mill) and, giving tongue with a great shout, roused Mr. Cartwright up to the knowledge that the long-expected attack was come. He was within walls, it is true; but against the fury of hundreds he had only four of his own workmen and five soldiers to assist him. These ten men, however, managed to keep up such a vigorous and well-directed fire of musketry that they defeated all the desperate attempts of the multitude

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outside to break down the doors; and after a conflict of twenty minutes, during which two of the assailants were killed and several wounded, they withdrew in confusion, leaving Mr. Cartwright master of the field." When the little party of girls and mistress had passed the historic meadow they came to a gabled inn by the roadside, the "Three Nuns", and Miss Wooler told them how the Luddites would assemble here after they had paraded at the Dumb Steeple to hear their orders, learn the passwords, and take the oath. Only a few yards farther and the girls came to the Dumb Steeple itself, a nameless, uninscribed, and therefore dumb monument at the crossroads. The girls stood awhile to gaze at this monument and imagine the sad, desperate men coming down the four roads and gathering about its plinth. Seventeen rioters were executed in the first months of the Luddite rising, and some of these had perhaps stood here, ready to pay this price.

And since executions are always a fascinating subject, Miss Wooler probably told them how one of the soldiers defending Cartwright's Mill was sentenced to three hundred lashes for refusing to fire on his brothers who were in the storming party, and how, a few days after the assault on the Mill, Mr. Horsfall of Marsden, another manufacturer and a friend and supporter of Cartwright, was waylaid and shot on Crossland Moor, for which murder three men were hanged at York.

Or the little company of schoolgirls turned northward and walked to Liversedge, and then Miss Wooler told them tales of the Rev. Hammond Roberson, the builder and famous first Vicar of Liversedge Church. Charlotte would be deeply interested now, for Hammond Roberson, that godly, fiery, and dreadful old man, had been one of her father's predecessors in the incumbency of Hartshead, a familiar friend of his, and a chief figure in his grim stories of Luddite marching and counter-marching.

Even as Nehemiah built the Temple with his trowel in one hand and his weapon in the other, so, we may say, Mr. Roberson built his church on a green spur for the blanket-weavers and wool dressers of Liversedge, while fighting and defying all mutinous mill-hands with sermons and threats and weapons at the ready. He stood armed and ready with all his

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household for the attack on Rawfolds Mill; and one can read between the lines that he wanted it to come that he might sally with guns to the rescue. "Old Roberson said he would wade to the knees in blood," Mary Taylor wrote to Mrs. Gaskell, "rather than the then state of things should be altered." When the schoolgirls on their afternoon walk came to Liversedge and saw the church and Rawfolds Mill in the distance I am sure they hoped for a glimpse of old Mr. Roberson, who was still Vicar at that time, and perchance of Mr. Cartwright himself, who was still the master of Rawfolds Mill, in the hollow below. But it is likely that all they saw were a few mill-hands, blue with woolen dye, coming from or going to the mills. If some of these were old grey men Charlotte would stare after them, wondering if they had been among those who had sworn their oaths by the Dumb Steeple and marched against the mills.

All this is *Shirley*; and if Mr. Brontë was one stream feeding that ample river, Miss Wooler was another, and a full and babbling beck too. So we, as we read the scenes of civil strife and angry violence in *Shirley*, are listening at one remove from her girls to the tales she told them on their country walks a hundred and twenty years ago.

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I went to Liversedge Church on its green knoll and there in its churchyard under the trees, a century after Hammond Roberson's death, the tyranny of that unchristian and devoted old savage was still visible. His iron and adamant impress was there. All the tombstones—or nearly all, for some seem to have defied him—were uniform: low squat headstones under shallow gables. He would allow no other, and if a parishioner erected one taller than the rest he had it dug up and tossed into the hollow under the knoll. One mourner presumed to have an ornamental design cut on a tombstone, and you can see the bite of Mr. Roberson's pickaxe where he hacked the decoration away. His own tombstone was there, low, squat, and gabled; and conforming to the stern pattern he had forced upon his people. It was an easy grave to find, at the eastern foot of the tilted churchyard.

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But no one, not the verger nor even the friendly and obliging vicar, could tell me where was the grave of William Cartwright, of Rawfolds Mill. I spent an Indian summer morning searching for it round the sides of that knoll. And at last, over against a solitary altar tomb in the north-east corner of the churchyard, I came upon a large flat stone almost completely overrun with high grasses, and I discovered beneath some dank autumn leaves the name "William". With my foot I forced the invading soil and wet grass aside; and, after "William", read "Cartwright of Rawfolds Died April 15th, 1839, Aged 64 years." His grave was not far from Hammond Roberson's, his old brother-in-arms.

By the evidence of the grass no one cared now that this man had once been a local hero and had a novel, *Shirley*, written about him. Not far from his grave was the grave of some Moores, and I wondered if Charlotte, her thoughts full of Roe Head days, had come here when she was dreaming out the plot of *Shirley*, and this grave was but ten years old, for, as we know, she gave to the character inspired by William Cartwright the name of Robert Moore.

CHAPTER SEVEN

CHARLOTTE left Roe Head in the summer of 1832, and for three years the children were at home. Charlotte, sixteen, and full of schemes for the family, promptly set up school in the dining-room. Emily and Anne attended, but whether Branwell, now fifteen, consented to be taught by a sister is not clear. Probably he read Latin with his father. Lessons lasted from nine till half past twelve, then the school went for a walk till dinner-time. After dinner the girls sewed garments for the poor up in their Aunt's bedroom and beneath her punctilious and exacting eye.

Tea-time put an end to all tasks, and the girls, happy as children released for play, set off for a long walk over the moors, Branwell, by his father's orders, accompanying them as protector. As often as not they took the rough and tortuous path between the grass of the Intakes, green as gems, and the purple bloom and stone-grey grass of the heather moor. This led them through forests of bracken and over quilts of bilberry and among the lonely boulders, down to their favourite "bottom", a watersmeet dell, where a runnel came tumbling over a cornice of rock to join the rust-red and froth-white stream that scampered from Stanbury Moor. Here they played till evening fell. At eight o'clock the family paraded in the study for prayers; at nine the father left the study for bed, calling out as he passed the dining-room door, "Now don't sit up late, children," and halting on the half-landing to wind the clock. Aunt and Tabby were already in their bedrooms, and now the girls were freer than they had been all day. They had the world to themselves; and they began their pacing of the dining-room—up and down or round and round, as they mooted their plans, discussed their writings, debated their difficulties, and shared their dreams. Tabby in after years would tell a fellow-servant that, "since they were bairns, they used to put away their sewing after prayers and walk and walk, all three, one after the other, round the table till near eleven o'clock". She would fall asleep to the sound of their feet. It is a curious picture, if true, this of the three girls walking round and

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round, for we cannot imagine Charlotte, much the smallest, anywhere but in the lead. Charlotte went first, I suppose; then the tall Emily; then the younger and humbler Anne. Every day was alike. "Thus," wrote Charlotte to Ellen Nussey, "in one delightful, though somewhat monotonous, course, my life is passed."

The friendship of Charlotte and Ellen was a hot love and exquisite passion just now. Charlotte had taken the pretty little Ellen and folded her in the protection of her wide, empty heart. She was the chief executive and general manager in this engrossing business, of course. Though they were of the same age almost to a day, and though Ellen had enjoyed social opportunities denied to the sequestered Charlotte, you can read in all Charlotte's letters to Ellen her consciousness of superior moral strength, deeper sophistication, and shrewder worldly wisdom.

She looks after Ellen's mind. "Your natural abilities are excellent, and under the direction of a judicious and able friend you might acquire a decided taste for elegant literature and even poetry." The "even" shows from what a height on Parnassus Charlotte, a poet, looked down upon Ellen. We have told how she instructed Ellen in the type of poetry with which she might begin the hazardous ascent to the height on which Charlotte stood. For a time she arranged that this fascinating passion should be conducted in French, so that the loving friends might increase their facility in an elegant language. She looked after Ellen's body. "I trust sincerely that your medical adviser is mistaken in supposing that you have any tendency to a pulmonary affection. I have seen enough of consumption to dread it as one of the most insidious and fatal diseases incident to humanity. . . . Take constant and regular exercise and all, I doubt not, will yet be well." She looked after her soul. "How have I improved in the past year, and with what good intentions do I view the dawn of its successor? These, my dearest Ellen, are weighty considerations which (young as we are) neither you nor I can too deeply or too seriously ponder." Ellen has visited London, to the flaming envy and immense enthusiasm of Charlotte. "Had you no feeling of intense and ardent interest when in St. James's you saw the palace where so many of England's kings have held their courts,

and beheld the representations of their persons on the walls? You should not be too much afraid of appearing country-bred; the magnificence of London has drawn exclamations of astonishment from travelled men, experienced in the world, its wonders and beauties." What a hungry and craving heart was there in that girl shut away in her parsonage from the wonders of the world!

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In September of 1832 she went on a fortnight's visit to Ellen's home, The Rydings, Birstall. This is an occasion to remark, for, though she does not know it yet, she is going to stay in Thornfield Hall, the home of Mr. Rochester. Branwell, fifteen, escorted the sixteen-year-old girl over the twenty dangerous miles between Haworth and Birstall. He had never before seen a house like The Rydings, with its battlements along the sky, its lawns in front, its rookery and falling garden behind, and its walled orchard down by the stream. He strolled about house and grounds delighted, excited, and fluent; and when he left he told Charlotte he was leaving her in Paradise. Here was another young, hungry, and fervent heart. There is a sense in which his words were true for, fourteen years later, The Rydings became the Thornfield Hall of *Jane Eyre* and a secret paradise to which her mind, bruised and overladen, escaped for some imagined rest, fulfilment, and love.

In the next summer when the purple was on the moor-crowns Ellen came to Haworth. And here I hand the tale over to her, since no words of mine could have the immediacy and actuality of hers. Here is the whole Haworth household, in the year 1833, in the artless words of its one enduring and immutable friend.

"When we reached the top of the village there was apparently no outlet, but we were directed to drive into an entry and then saw the church close at hand, and we entered on the short lane which led to the parsonage gateway. Here Charlotte was waiting, having caught the sound of the approaching gig. When greetings and introductions were over Miss Branwell (the aunt of the

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Brontës) took possession of their guest and treated her with the care and solicitude due to a weary traveller. Mr. Brontë also was stirred out of his usual retirement by his own kind consideration, for not only the guest but the manservant and the horse were to be made comfortable. . . . Even at this time Mr. Brontë struck me as looking very venerable, with his snow-white hair and powdered white collar. His manner and mode of speech always had the tone of high-bred courtesy. He was considered something of an invalid and always lived in the most abstemious and simple manner. . . . Miss Branwell, their aunt, was a small, antiquated little lady. She wore caps large enough for half a dozen of the present fashion and a front of light auburn curls over her forehead. . . . In the summer she spent part of the afternoon in reading aloud to Mr. Brontë. In the winter evenings she must have enjoyed this; for she and Mr. Brontë often had to finish their discussions on what she had read when we all met for tea. She would be very lively and intelligent and tilt arguments against Mr. Brontë without fear. Tabby, the faithful, trustworthy old servant, was very quaint in appearance—very active, and in these days the general servant and factotum. We were all 'chilfer' and 'bairns' in her estimation. She still kept to her duty of walking out with the 'chilfer' if they went any distance from home, unless Branwell were sent by his father as protector. . . .

"Emily Brontë had by this time acquired a lithesome, graceful figure. She was the tallest person in the house, except her father. Her hair, which was naturally as beautiful as Charlotte's, was in the same unbecoming tight curl and frizz, and there was the same want of complexion. She had very beautiful eyes—kind, kindling, liquid eyes, but she did not often look at you; she was too reserved. Their colour might be said to be dark grey, at other times dark blue, they varied so. She talked very little. She and Anne were like twins—inseparable companions and in the very closest sympathy.

"Anne—dear, gentle Anne—was quite different in appearance from the others. She was her aunt's favourite. Her hair was a pretty light brown and fell on her neck in graceful curls. She had lovely violet-blue eyes, fine, pencilled eyebrows, and clear, almost transparent complexion. . . .

"In fine and suitable weather delightful rambles were made

over the moors and down into glens and ravines that here and there broke the monotony of the moorland. The rugged bank and rippling brook were treasures of delight. Emily, Anne, and Branwell used to ford the streams, and sometimes placed stepping-stones for the other two; there was always a lingering delight in these sports—every moss, every flower, every tint and form, were noted and enjoyed. Emily especially had gleesome delight in these nooks of beauty—her reserve for the time vanished. One long ramble made in these early days was far away over the moors, to a spot familiar to Emily and Anne, which they called 'The Meeting of the Waters'. It was a small oasis of emerald-green turf, broken here and there by small clear springs; a few large stones served as resting-places; seated here, we were hidden from all the world, nothing appearing in view but miles and miles of heather, a glorious blue sky, and brightening sun. A fresh breeze wafted on us its exhilarating influence; we laughed and made mirth of each other, and settled we should call ourselves the Quartette. Emily, half reclining on a slab of stone, played like a young child with the tadpoles in the water, making them swim about, and then fell to moralising on the strong and the weak, the brave and the cowardly, as she chased them with her hand."

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Emily at fifteen is as difficult to capture for her portrait as Charlotte is easy. As always she is fugitive. Charlotte's published letters amount to many hundreds; of Emily's there are but three and they, characteristically, are brief formal notes that tell us nothing about herself. They mask her real features, and are impenetrable. So we are grateful to Ellen Nussey for this happy snapshot, and also for a vague and incomplete picture which she penned, when an old lady, for Mr. Clement Shorter. "Few people have the gift of looking and smiling as Emily could look and smile," she wrote. "One of her rare expressive looks was something to remember through life, there was such a depth of soul and feeling, and yet a shyness of revealing herself—a strength of self-containment seen in no other. . . . She and gentle Anne were to be seen twined together as united statues of power



"A little and a lone green lane":
the pathway to the moors, Haworth.



Law Hill,
the House.

Law Hill,
the Yard
and
Warehouse

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and humility. They were to be seen with their arms lacing each other in their younger days whenever their occupations permitted their union. . . . A spell of mischief lurked in her on occasions when out on the moors. She enjoyed leading Charlotte where she would not dare to go of her own free will. Charlotte had a mortal dread of unknown animals, and it was Emily's pleasure to lead her into close vicinity, and to tell her of how and of what she had done, laughing at her horror with great amusement. . . ." Here, in this matter of these "unknown animals"—we see the extreme femininity of Charlotte and the vein of masculinity in Emily.

Fortunately we have a brilliantly clear glimpse of Emily at sixteen in a miniature paper, pen-printed by herself, which she had intended for no eyes but Anne's. You can see the stained and perishing fragment in the living-room at Haworth, but you cannot read it; no, not with a magnifying glass, so infinitesimal is the "print". This is it:

"Emily Jane Brontë Anne Brontë

"I fed Rainbow, Diamond, Snowflake, Jasper Pheasant (alias)

"This morning Branwell went down to Mr. Driver's and brought news that Sir Robert Peel was going to be invited to stand for Leeds. Anne and I have been peeling apples for Charlotte to make a pudding and for Aunt's [illegible word]. Charlotte said she made puddings perfectly and she [illegible word] of quick but limited intellect. Taby said just now Come Anne pilloputate. Aunt has come into the kitchen just now and said Where are your feet Anne Anne answered On the floor Aunt. Papa opened the parlour door and gave Branwell a letter saying Here Branwell read this and show it to your Aunt and Charlotte. The Gondals are discovering the interior of Gaaldine. Sally Mosley is washing in the back kitchen.

"It is past twelve o'clock Anne and I have not tided ourselves, done our bed work, or done our lessons and we want to go out to play We are going to have for dinner Boiled Beef, Turnips, potatoes and apple pudding The kitchen is in a very untidy state Anne and I have not our music exercise which consists of *b major* Taby said on my putting a pen in her face Ya

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pitter pottering there instead of pilling a potate. I answered O dear, O dear, O dear I will derectly With that I get up, take a knife and begin pilling. Finished pilling the potatoes Papa going to walk Mr. Sunderland expected.

“Anne and I say I wonder what we shall be like and what we shall be and where we shall be, if all goes on well, in the year 1874—in which year I shall be in my 57th year. Anne will be in her 55th year Branwell will be going on his 58th year and Charlotte in her 59th year Hoping we shall all be well at that time We close our paper.”

Macduff to Rosse

“And all my children?”

“Well too.”

“The tyrant has not battered at their peace.”

“No, they were well at peace when I did leave them.”

What comfort is in this paper for all literary aspirants since it shows that you can be a vessel of gestating genius and yet blind to such secondary matters as punctuation and spelling. And how satisfying it is to know that you can be the author of a *Wuthering Heights* and of some very melancholy poems indeed and with it all be a daily vessel of laughter and fun.

I think that all her life Emily enjoyed the household chores. In the tasks of the home there is a bodily rhythm that aids, an earthy simplicity that appeals to, and, perhaps we may add, a secret discipline that fortifies, the peculiar visionary quality of a mind like Emily's. In the first picture that we have of her, from Charlotte's hand, we see her, aged eleven, “brushing the carpet in the parlour”—that is, in her father's study—and we can almost hear her enjoyment in the words. The above document shows her peeling the apples and the potatoes. And it will continue so. We shall see her throughout our story, kneading, baking, washing, ironing, sand-stoning the stairs, raking the fire, turning the mangle, and turning Branwell's collars and cuffs. Her last action the night before she died was to feed the dogs, and in the morning before her last agony she picked up her needle and tried to sew.

Of her impassioned love for the earth, embracing alike its flowers and its weeds, and for the beasts of the earth, from her

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fierce dog to the smallest fledgling bird which she would bring home in her hand, soothing and stroking it, we have abundant evidence and shall speak of at large when we consider her Franciscan mysticism. Her love for the soft and tender Anne, the youngest of the family, was perhaps a piece with this—as, I am certain, was her tenderness to Branwell when, later, he was a wrecked and ruined man, written off as a total loss. Her long arm on Anne's shoulder, Anne's arm about her waist, they would tramp the moors (or the dining-room), playing their Gondal game.

Now my business in this book is to follow in the steps of these people's minds, even more than of their feet, for they did not travel far; and I have most conscientiously tried to follow in the tracks of Emily and Anne as they journey together in the parts around Gondaland—but I have only got completely lost and suffered no little vertigo. I lose all sight of the two of them in northern mists, among chartless archipelagoes, and in handsome but complicated cities. The praiseworthy attempt has therefore been abandoned. I can only tell you that while Charlotte and Branwell, one pair of soul-partners, frequently visited a country called Angria in East Africa, Emily and Anne had the freedom, thanks to the creative power of Emily, of a vast world in the North and South Pacific. Here are some of the places in this world, jotted down by Anne at the back of a *Grammar of General Geography*—which seems a good place to have put them:

Alexandria, a kingdom in Gaaldine.

Almedore, a kingdom in Gaaldine.

Elseraden, a kingdom in Gaaldine.

Gaaldine, a large Island newly discovered in the South Pacific.

Gondal, a large Island in the North Pacific.

Regina, the capitol of Gondal.

Ula, a kingdom in Gaaldine, governed by 4 Sovereigns.

Zelona, a kingdom in Gaaldine.

Zedora, a large Provence in Gaaldine governed by a Viceroy.

Here are some of the Chief People in these Islands, kingdoms, and capitols. King Julius (sometimes called Julius Brenzaida), Rosina Alcons (his beloved), A. G. Alaisda, Fernando, E. L. Glenedin, F. de Samars, Lady Geralda, Olivia Vernon, Solala

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Vernon, and Alexandrina Zenobia. Emily was usually King Julius, while Anne was Alexandrina Zenobia; Emily the man, Anne the woman. The whole cycle would seem to have been an epic of tumultuous wars "with banners bravely flying", ill-starred loves, dark treacheries, and bloody but condign vengeance.

You may wonder as you will, but Emily was still playing this game with Anne when she was twenty-seven and Anne twenty-five. In another secret Emily-Anne paper, of which we shall speak later, dated July 30th, 1845, her twenty-seventh birthday, Emily writes of a recent excursion with Anne to York: "And during our excursion we were Ronald Macalgin, Henry Angora, Juliet Augusteena, Rosabella Esmaldan, Ella and Julian Egremont, Catherine Navarre, and Cordelia Fitzaphnold, escaping from the palaces of instruction to join the royalists who are hard driven at present by the Victorious republicans. The Gondals still flourish as bright as ever. I am at present writing a work on the First War. Anne has been writing some articles on this, and a book by Henry Sophona. We intend sticking firm by the rascals as long as they delight us, which I am glad to say they do at present."

But not here, not even in these distant or closeted games with Anne, is the inmost being of Emily to be discerned, unless it is in some noble poems attributed to Julius Brenzaida, R. Alcons, and others, among which are *The Prisoner*, *The Visionary*, and *Cold in the Earth*; but even in these she has donned her mask and left us with our question.

Others abide our question. Thou art free
We ask and ask: Thou smilest and art still,
Out-topping knowledge. For the loftiest hill
That to the stars uncrowns his majesty,
Planting his steadfast footsteps in the seas,
Making the Heaven of Heavens his dwelling-place,
Spares but the cloudy border of his base
To the foil'd searching of mortality:
And thou, who didst the stars and sunbeams know,
Self-school'd, self-scann'd, self-honoured, self-secure,
Didst walk on Earth unguess'd at. Better so!

CHAPTER EIGHT

I WOULD put Midsummer 1835 as the date when Charlotte more or less openly assumed command of the family. She was then nineteen, Branwell eighteen, Emily seventeen, and Anne fifteen and a half. The clock on the stairs was ticking the years away; while her father, the captain of the ship *de jure*, kept to his study, and though he was usually ready to come when called upon, the ship, with its master cabined below, was in danger of drifting. Moreover he was nearly seventy now, and getting very blind; and if anything happened to his earning power they were stranded. Aunt Branwell kept herself to her room; and, in any case, Charlotte feared her old-fashioned and constricted ideas. Their mother was dead; Maria was dead; Branwell was too feckless and pleasure-loving to be of much use; Emily was too vague and remote; Anne was too young and even when older would be too gentle to cope with the world; so there was no one but Charlotte to occupy the bridge and put a firm hand upon the wheel.

Let us be clear what she looked like at nineteen. She must have grown to her full height, and that was small indeed. Harriet Martineau said of her later that she was "the smallest creature I had ever seen except at a fair". A teacher at Cowan Bridge wrote, "In size Charlotte was remarkably diminutive; and if, as has been recently asserted, she never grew an inch after leaving the Clergy Daughters' School, she must have been a literal dwarf . . . the idea is absurd." Thackeray's daughter described her as a "tiny little lady . . . and we all smile as my father stoops to offer his arm; for, though genius she may be, Miss Brontë can barely reach his elbow." Mrs. Gaskell, after explaining that her head and limbs were in just proportion to the small, fragile body, speaks of her "soft thick brown hair and peculiar eyes, of which I find it difficult to give a description, as they appeared to me in her later life. They were large and well-shaped; their colour a reddish-brown; but if the iris was closely examined it appeared to be composed of a great variety of tints. The usual expression was of quiet, listening intelligence; but now

and then, on some just occasion for vivid interest or wholesome indignation, a light would shine out, as if some spiritual lamp had been kindled, which glowed behind those expressive orbs. I never saw the like in any other human creature. As for the rest of her features, they were plain, large, and ill-set, but, unless you began to catalogue them, you were hardly aware of the fact, for the eyes and power of the countenance overbalanced every physical defect. . . . Her hands and feet were the smallest I ever saw; When one of the former was placed in mine it was like the soft touch of a bird in the middle of my palm."

It was this hand that she laid upon the wheel. And not with the soft touch of a bird: rather with the tight hold of a master who was determined to drive his barque safely into its distant port. And she drove it there, through terrible storms. It was a grim protracted fight against poverty, isolation, sickness, shackling shyness, wracked nerves, morbid dread of strangers, madness in the house, failure, failure, disease in the house, and death. But she arrived at the port where she would be.

It is so fine a story that we may cheerfully change the grand metaphor for a lighter one. "Charlotte said she made puddings perfectly, and she (is?) of quick but limited intellect." So wrote Emily; and Charlotte certainly set herself now to make, with the ingredients at her disposal, as perfect a pudding as possible out of the Brontë family. She became the agent for the Brontës, managing all their business for them and marketing such wares as they had to offer. In due time she became the agent for Emily Brontë, poet and novelist, against that proud girl's will; and praise God for that. This diminutive woman, in her passionate loyalty to her family, all of whom were bigger than herself, created The Brontës; and, far more than the creator of *Shirley* and *Villette*, those books as uneven as the moors and as purple in places, this is the Charlotte before whom I bow. What is this book I am writing but the story of her triumph?

It is really opened now, the long campaign that she conducted from her G.H.Q., the dining-room of a parsonage on the edge of the world. First they must all be able to earn their own livings. Emily and Anne must have some real schooling; she, who'd had some, could meanwhile be earning money as a teacher. So she arranged with Miss Wooler to be a teacher at her school,

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and to bring Emily with her as a pupil, Anne to follow later. (The campaign can be studied in four stages: first she organised her sisters as scholars, then as schoolmistresses, then as governesses, and then as geniuses.) Branwell should go to London and study art at the Royal Academy; the whole family had had some lessons in drawing and painting from a Mr. William Robinson (who behaved as art masters sometimes do and was dismissed) and, while all showed exceptional talent, it was the boy alone who could hope to make a living through art. Here is an early despatch from the Commander-in-Chief, sent, of course, to Ellen Nussey. "We are all about to divide, break up, separate. Emily is going to school, Branwell is going to London, and I am going to be a governess. This last determination I formed myself, knowing that I should have to take the step sometime, and 'better sune as syne', to use the Scotch proverb; and, knowing also that Papa would have enough to do with his limited income, should Branwell be placed at the Royal Academy and Emily at Roe Head. Where am I going to reside? you will ask. Within four miles of you, at a place neither of us is unacquainted with, being no other than the identical Roe Head mentioned above. Yes, I am going to teach in the very school where I was myself taught. . . . I am sad—very sad—at the thought of leaving home; but duty—necessity—these are stern mistresses who will not be disobeyed. . . . Emily and I leave home on the 29th of this month; the idea of being together consoles us both somewhat, and, truth, since I must enter a situation, 'My lines have fallen in pleasant places.' I both love and respect Miss Wooler."

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So Emily found herself among the soft gardens, the woody hills, and the rich green pastures of the Calder Valley. There were rose-beds and birdsong and fragrant airs, but nowhere a glimpse of purple moor. She found herself among the scenes of the Luddite revolt, and they did not interest her at all. She found herself one of a string of schoolgirls going in at a wicket-gate, with Charlotte as teacher following behind; she found herself expected to play ball-games with them—she who could hardly bear the

eyes of strangers on her face—and to learn the things that Miss Wooler considered correct in a young lady; and her heart stormed against this strangulation of something in herself.

What happened is an extraordinary witness to the violent “something” that was battenéd down in this young girl. She felt imprisoned in all this lush beauty and beneath this small sky. It was all too soft, too beautiful; according too ill with the harsh realities which she was beginning to perceive; and Miss Wooler was too soft, too lady-like, too unreal. There is a passage in Hardy’s description of Egdon Heath to which Emily would have said two words, “That’s right”; just as she did on an occasion of which Mary Taylor tells us. “One time I mentioned that someone had asked what religion I was of, and that I had said that that was between God and me;—Emily (who was lying on the hearth-rug) exclaimed, ‘That’s right.’ That was all I ever heard Emily say on religious subjects.”

Substitute Haworth Moor for Egdon Heath and here is a reading, I suggest, of Emily’s anguished maladjustment at Roe Head. “It was a spot which returned upon the memory of those who loved it with an aspect of peculiar and kindly congruity. Smiling champaigns of flowers and fruit hardly do this, for they are permanently harmonious only with an existence of better reputation as to its issues than the present. Twilight combined with the scenery of Egdon Heath to evolve a thing majestic without severity, impressive without showiness, emphatic in its admonitions, grand in its simplicity. The qualifications which frequently invest the façade of a prison with far more dignity than is found in the façade of a palace double its size lent to this heath a sublimity in which spots renowned for beauty of the accepted kind are utterly wanting. Fair prospects wed happily with fair times; but, alas, if times be not fair!”

No one dare tell a tale of Emily when Charlotte has already told it, for, in after years, when Emily was dead, Charlotte could not take up her pen to write of her but it ran with power and beauty. And Charlotte, writing of Emily’s day sat Roe Head, says: “My sister Emily loved the moors. Flowers brighter than the rose bloomed in the blackest of the heath for her; out of a sullen hollow in a livid hillside her mind could make an Eden. She found in the bleak solitude many and dear delights; and not the

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least and best-loved was liberty. Liberty was the breath of Emily's nostrils; without it she perished. The change from her own home to a school, and from her own very noiseless, very secluded, but unrestricted and unartificial mode of life to one of disciplined routine (though under the kindest auspices) was what she failed in enduring. Her nature was here too strong for her fortitude. Every morning when she woke the visions of home and the moors rushed on her, and darkened and saddened the day that lay before her. Nobody knew what ailed her but me. I knew only too well. In this struggle her health was quickly broken: her white face, attenuated form, and failing strength threatened rapid decline. I felt in my heart she would die if she did not go home."

It is an extraordinary picture of a girl wasting with imprisoned power.

What language can utter the feeling
Which rose when in exile afar,
On the brow of a lonely hill kneeling,
I saw the brown heath growing there?

It was scattered and stunted, and told me
That soon even that would be gone:
It whispered: "The grim walls enfold me
I have bloomed in my last summer's sun."

But not the loved music whose waking
Makes the soul of the Swiss die away,
Has a spell more adored and heart-breaking
Than for me, in that blighted heath lay.

•The spirit which bent 'neath its power,
How it longed—how it burned to be free!
If I could have wept in that hour,
Those tears had been heaven to me.

Well—well; the sad minutes are moving,
Though loaded with trouble and pain;
And sometime the loved and the loving
Shall meet on the mountains again.

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Emily may have written these verses a little later, but they are her own statement, the companion to Charlotte's, of her wasting sickness at Roe Head.

So Emily returned to Haworth ; and Anne went to Roe Head in her place ; and she, so much easier a colt to ride, remained as Miss Wooler's and Charlotte's pupil for two years. At home Emily was happy, I think. She was much alone. Her father and aunt were in their rooms, Charlotte and Anne were at Roe Head, and Branwell was all too often at the Black Bull Inn on the other side of the church. Tabby was nearing seventy, and Emily took much of the housework upon herself. She swept, cooked, washed, and ironed. She made the bread with a German book propped up before her as she kneaded the dough. In the evenings, alone in the living-room, or up in the narrow box-room where now she slept, she wrote her earliest extant poems. They are not good ; in fact they are for the most part very bad ; but she had the eyes to see this and the ears to hear it. Under one poem she wrote : "I am more terrifically and idiotically and brutally STUPID than ever I was in the whole course of my incarnate existence. The above precious lines are the fruits of one hour's most agonising labour between $\frac{1}{2}$ past 6 and $\frac{1}{2}$ past 7 in the evening of July—1836." I commend these most comfortable words to all struggling poets of eighteen : they may yet be Emily Brontës.

It was natural that Branwell should drift down the lane, or through the churchyard, to the "Black Bull". His father was shut away in one room, his aunt in another, Emily was locked in thought, Charlotte, his pal, was away ; and he was *not* of the kind that is happy alone. In the "Black Bull" "t'Vicar's Patrick" was admired and loved ; and the egotism in him, already somewhat hypertrophied, craved this opportunity for self-display.

The "Black Bull" was his club-house ; and the club in the house had a name ; it was called "The Lodge of the Three Graces" ; and in February 1836 Branwell was made a brother of the lodge, John Brown, the sexton from the house across the lane, being the Worshipful Master. Later the new brother became a Junior Warden and the Club's Secretary. It was a very lively club, and a thirsty one, to judge from a letter written by the Secretary to the Worshipful Master which will appear in its place. It is a

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remarkable fact that, at the same time, Branwell became Secretary of the Haworth Temperance Society—so split was he between John Brown and Mr. Brontë; between the convivial sexton and the puritan parson. We should consider for a moment what it meant to this brilliant lad, in all the hunger of his twentieth year, to have only John Brown, the sexton, for a best friend.

For some reason that has never been clear the project of sending Branwell to the Royal Academy had fallen through; but he did visit London. We know that he visited Westminster Abbey—or at any rate its western façade—and the Castle Tavern in Holborn, where he was certainly not content with a view of its exterior, for it was kept by the veteran prize-fighter, Tom Spring, and frequented by the principal sporting characters of the time. He went in, and, according to a Mr. Woolven, enjoyed a considerable personal success among the habitués—as he always did in such circles. Branwell was loved by his friends and buddies, who leapt to his defence when, after his death, Mrs. Gaskell sounded the hunt against him, and the world followed. We may be sure that when he got home the “Black Bull” heard about the Castle Tavern, and the parsonage about Westminster Abbey.

So the year 1836 went by, and at Christmas the family was together again. And this Christmas holiday two significant things happened. First, Tabby, falling down on the steep and icy street, broke her leg, and Miss Branwell persuaded Mr. Brontë that the old woman ought to go to her sister’s in the village to be nursed. The three girls, hearing of this order, protested against it, but their protests did not avail; so they initiated a hunger strike. They refused to eat unless the order was revoked and they were given permission to nurse Tabby. Mr. Brontë, who had never liked the idea of sending Tabby away, surrendered; Miss Branwell had to do so too; and the strikers enjoyed a complete triumph. We are not told who led this National Union of Brontë Children. It may have been Charlotte, but it savours of Emily.

The next event I shall designate, in the terms of today, the “Operation Southey”. Charlotte was invariably, after the first week or so, miserable in her teaching situations and waspishly critical of her employers—the pattern recurs monotonously through the next eight years of her life—and she was now

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miserable at Roe Head and critical of Miss Wooler. Was there no other road than teaching to the thing she longed for, a "competence"? Their writings? Could the family make any money by its writings? How know if there was any chance of this? After weighing the question with Branwell, her confidant, she began a brief operation. From her base at the parsonage she surveyed the country she must conquer and shot her gun at a very prominent feature, the Poet Laureate. She wrote to Robert Southey, expounding her problem and enclosing some poems for his criticism. Meanwhile Branwell had trained a gun on Wordsworth, but for the moment held his fire. Branwell had already bombarded the editor of *Blackwood's Magazine*, "the most able periodical there is", with offers to write for him. His letters to Mr. Blackwood are astounding documents.

"SIR. . . . James Hogg . . . and others like him, gave your magazine the peculiar character which made it famous; as these men die it will decay unless their places be supplied by others like them. Now, sir, to you I appear writing with conceited assurance: but I *am not*; for I know myself so far as to believe in my own originality, and on that ground I desire of you admittance into your ranks. . . . I *know* that I am not one of the wretched writers of the day. I know that I possess strength to assist you beyond some of your own contributors. . . . Now, sir, do not act like a commonplace person, but like a man willing to examine for himself. Do not turn from the naked truth of my letters, but *prove me*. . . . You have lost an able writer in James Hogg, and God grant you may *gain* one in Patrick Branwell Brontë."

The editor made no response to the letters, though Branwell refused to despair of him and urged him again and again to higher things. And now, Southey not replying to Charlotte, Branwell tried once more to impress Mr. Blackwood, before opening fire on Wordsworth. "In a former letter I hinted that I was in possession of something, the design of which, whatever might be its execution, would be superior to that of any series of articles which has yet appeared in *Blackwood's Magazine*. . . . Will you still so wearisomely refuse me a word when you can neither know what you refuse or whom you are refusing. . . . Do you think your magazine so perfect that

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no addition to its power would be either possible or desirable? Is it pride which actuates you—or custom—or prejudice? Be a man, sir! and think no more of these things."

Still the editor did not respond, and Branwell turned from him at last as a "hopeless being". He wrote to Wordsworth, enclosing some verses. The letter to Wordsworth is much more humble; it is even at first glance attractive in its modesty; but it contains the all-revealing sentence, "Surely, in this day, when there is not a writing poet worth a sixpence, the field must be open if a better man can step forward."

In these letters, and especially those to Mr. Blackwood, there are symptoms, it appears to me, of incipient derangement. A feeling of superiority so enlarged, and the loose control which allows it to be expressed so openly and wildly, are suggestive of paranoia. The brain which could compose, and probably rejoice in, such sentences is like an engine whose governor is swinging improperly and failing to control the steam. And here is the difference between Charlotte and Branwell. Charlotte's self-acting governor, her strong common-sense, never failed, despite a little spitting, to control her high-pressure steam, sometimes even controlling it too sternly; Branwell's was broken.

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Early in March Southey replied to Charlotte in a considerate and kindly but discouraging letter. He regretted that he should have to "cast a damp over the high spirits and generous desires of youth"; he assured her that she possessed, and in no inconsiderable degree, the faculty of verse but unfortunately in these times this faculty was not rare; and then bluntly told her: "Literature cannot be the business of a woman's life, and it ought not to be. The more she is engaged in her proper duties, the less leisure will she have for it, even as an accomplishment and a recreation." But, perhaps fearing that this would wound too deeply, he added, in words that seem to contradict those that had gone before: "But do not suppose that I disparage the gift which you possess; nor that I would discourage you from using it. . . . Write poetry for its own sake, not in a spirit of emulation,

and not with a view to celebrity; the less you aim at that, the more likely you will be to deserve and finally to obtain it."

Charlotte, a little bruised, but proud of having received so friendly a letter from the Poet Laureate, could not resist replying at length; and among the sentences that close her long and grateful reply are these—unconsciously they tell us much:

"Following my father's advice—who from my childhood has counselled me, just in the wise and friendly tone of your letter—I have endeavoured not only attentively to observe all the duties a woman ought to fulfil, but to feel deeply interested in them. I don't always succeed, for sometimes when I'm teaching or sewing I would rather be reading or writing; but I try to deny myself, and my father's approbation amply rewarded me for the privation. Once more allow me to thank you with sincere gratitude. I trust I shall never more feel ambitious to see my name in print; if the wish should arise, I'll look at Southey's letter and suppress it."

Thus it was that Charlotte came down from Parnassus.

But the disappointment was deeper than she confessed. All this year she was very unhappy in her situation with Miss Wooler. Miss Wooler had moved her school from Roe Head to an old house above Dewsbury, on Dewsbury Moor. The house is still there, in Heald's Road, and when I went to look at it, an interesting but unlovely old place, long and low and standing in a rather bare and unlovely country, I could not imagine why Miss Wooler had exchanged the beauty of Roe Head for this, until it occurred to me that the school was not flourishing and doubtless these premises were cheaper than the fine house and gardens of Roe Head.

It was fascinating to wander round and within the old grey buildings where Charlotte suffered such agonies of spirit, and to be shown the room where, as it is believed, Charlotte, hiding her private griefs, tried to teach her little brood of pupils, one of whom was Anne. "Dewsbury is a poisoned place to me," she told Ellen long afterwards. Looking at the narrow windows I tried to imagine her state. She was twenty-one; and twenty-one is a landmark at any time; in 1837 it was a more alarming landmark in a woman's life than it is now. Up in that

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prisoning room the narrow breast of Charlotte Brontë was a bomb full-charged with incompatible desires.

She wanted to see great cities; to wander through historic palaces; to be present at pomp and pageantry; to meet famous people and hear their talk; to stand before great paintings and gaze at splendid buildings and listen to great music; to read everything that should be read and be equal in knowledge and accomplishments with the best; to create something of beauty herself, and, almost as much as any of these, to be alone with the sea. Nothing is more pathetic than her longing to see the glory of the sea. The first time she saw it, with Ellen when she was twenty-three, she asked to be left alone, for she was crying. "Have you forgotten the sea by this time, Ellen? Is it grown dim in your mind? Or can you still see it, dark, blue, and green, and foam-white, and hear it roaring roughly when the wind is high, or rushing softly when it is calm?" And in *Shirley*: "I shall like to go, Shirley. I long to hear the sound of waves—ocean waves—and to see them as I have imagined them in dreams, like tossing banks of green light, strewed with vanishing and reappearing wreaths of foam, whiter than lilies. I shall delight to pass the shores of those lone rock-islets where the sea-birds live and breed unmolested. We shall be on the track of the old Scandinavians—of the Norsemen. We shall almost see the shores of Norway."

She wanted also, very much, to be good and do her duty by her old father and her family. She wanted to be right with God; to make her calling and election sure—she wanted it so much that she was soon on the edge of religious mania, doubting her chance of salvation and wondering if she was reprobate. "Dewsbury Moor, January 4th, 1830. . . . We have entered on a new year. Will it be stained as darkly as the last with all our sins, follies, secret vanities, and uncontrolled passion and propensities? I trust not, but I feel in nothing better, neither humbler nor purer. . . . Come to see me, my dear Ellen."

One spark, and such a bomb will burst. Miss Wooler supplied the spark. Anne seemed ill. She was coughing and felt some pain as she breathed. Cowan Bridge! . . . Maria! . . . Elizabeth! . . . Charlotte went to Miss Wooler and poured out her anxiety; and the unfortunate Miss Wooler so misconceived her role as to say,

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or imply, that Charlotte was making too much out of too little. Charlotte burst. Ever splendid as a tigress when she suspected that she, or any other cub of the Brontë litter, was being improperly treated, she flew at Miss Wooler and worried her as a dog worries a rag. "We came," she tells Ellen, "to a little *éclaircissement*." Delightful word for the brilliant burst of an enormous concealed bomb. A little "clarification" that left Miss Wooler ill for two days. No need to describe the fracas; the slowest imagination can recreate it from Charlotte's letter to Ellen.

"You were right in your conjectures respecting the cause of my sudden departure. Anne continued wretchedly ill, neither the pain or the difficulty of breathing left her, and how could I feel otherwise than very miserable. I looked on her case in a different light to what I could wish or expect any uninterested person to view it in. Miss Wooler thought me a fool, and by way of proving her opinion treated me with marked coldness. We came to a little *éclaircissement* one evening. I told her one or two rather plain truths, which set her a-crying; and the next day, unknown to me, she wrote Papa, telling him that I had reproached her bitterly, taken her severely to task, etc. Papa sent for us the day after he had received her letter. Meantime I had formed a firm resolution to quit Miss Wooler and her concerns for ever; but just before I went away she took me to her room, and, giving way to her feelings, which in general she restrains far too rigidly, gave me to understand that in spite of her cold, repulsive manners she had a considerable regard for me, and would be very sorry to part with me. If anybody likes me, I cannot help liking them; and remembering that she had in general been very kind to me, I gave in and said I would come back if she wished me. So we are settled again for the present, but I am not satisfied. I should have respected her far more if she had turned me out of doors, instead of crying for two days and two nights together. I was in a regular passion; my '*warm temper*' quite got the better of me, of which I don't boast, for it is a weakness; nor am I ashamed of it, for I had reason to be angry."



Entrance Gateway to High Sunderland Hall

Main House door, High Sunderland Hall

CHAPTER NINE

IN the autumn of 1837 Emily, now nineteen, went as a teacher to Miss Patchett's school at Law Hill, Southowram, near Halifax. We know very little about her sojourn there; it is not even clear whether it lasted for six months or sixteen. We know that Law Hill was a prosperous and even fashionable school for the young ladies of Halifax; we know that Miss Patchett was a handsome and vivacious woman, forty-five years old, who later married the Vicar of Southowram; we have a letter of Charlotte's in which she says: "My sister Emily is gone into a situation as teacher in a large school of near forty pupils, near Halifax. I have had one letter from her since her departure—it gives an appalling account of her duties. Hard labour from six in the morning until near eleven at night, with only one half-hour of exercise between. This is slavery. I fear she will never stand it" (but much of this can be discounted, for Charlotte suffered from an itch to attack the employers of herself and her sisters); we know that, fifty years afterwards, old ladies who were once schoolgirls at Law Hill remembered a "Miss Brontë there long ago" and testified that she was "not unpopular"; and from one of these we know that Emily once told her class of little girls that she much preferred the dog to any of them; which was neither Franciscan nor saintly, but very natural, and almost certainly true.

That is all we know, but a study of the house and its neighbourhood, and of Emily's poems written in 1838, suggests that things happened while she was at Law Hill that are of importance in her story and to all lovers of *Wuthering Heights*.

Let us visit the place. We climb by a mountain road out of Halifax. To say this is hardly to exaggerate, for Beacon Hill rises steeply from the Hebble bottom, and the road, which has replaced the old pack-horse track, worms up the hanging hillside above mountains of slag and refuse, the earth sour and sick beneath them. Halifax smokes and steams in its pit below; its spires and factory chimneys holding aloft a canopy of cloud and tar-smelling vapours. We come above the 700 contour line

to find a grey, stone township straggling along the billowy tops. This is Southowram, and the house on the highest swell of all is Law Hill. It is a gaunt, three-storey, flat-fronted house, staring from oblong windows over an immense prospect. If Emily had a room under the roof she could look from her window at the distant range of Oxenhope Moor, which for her meant Haworth, and in the opposite direction at the hills of Hightown and Hartshead; beyond which Charlotte and Anne were at their school on Dewsbury Moor. West of the house is a square farmyard with a warehouse, farm buildings, and enclosing walls around it. At least they were warehouse and farm buildings in Emily's day; now the warehouse is converted into cottages, and the mistal, or cattle-house, is in ruins: I stood in one of its stalls out of the rain.

It was the yard that interested me most. Weeds grew among the broken flags; at one end was a litter of fallen beams, tumbled brickwork and twisted pipes; the warehouse wall, now the back wall of the cottages, was a blind cliff, its old windows blocked up with stones; but in the corner by the house itself stood a handsome horse-mount; and that horse-mount brought back the old prosperous days into the yard. It proclaimed what a hundred years could do in the way of detrition and social overthrow. I heard the shrill, laughing voices of Miss Patchett's girls as they tripped up the horse-mount steps in their long riding habits and mounted their side-saddles; I saw Miss Patchett mounting too, for she was a keen horsewoman; I saw Emily standing by. The house-dog barked—the dog which she so much preferred to the children. Then the scene became early morning, and I saw Emily crossing this yard from the house because the schoolroom was up in the warehouse.

What was the closed and secret Emily thinking, up there in her class-room or here in the yard? It may be that she was thinking and suffering much; for, even though I bring about my ears all those vestal-worshippers who want their Emily untouched by human love—even though the followers of Miss Sinclair cry aloud that it were better I had never been born—I must state my belief in the possibility (no more) that Emily, during her time of service at Law Hill, experienced a passionate love—a love which ended in a parting and was, for years after-

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wards, vested for her in an aura of guilt—now the lover's guilt, now her own. I say only that this is the likeliest interpretation of poems written now and in the next years. In the terms of the scientists, it is the most economical hypothesis.

It's over now; I've known it all;
I'll hide it in my heart no more
But back again that night recall,
And think the fearful vision o'er.

The evening sun, in cloudless shine,
Had passed from summer's heaven divine,
And dark the shades of twilight grew,
And stars were in the depth of blue;

And in the heath on mountains far
From human eye and human care,
With thoughtful heart and tearful eye
I sadly watched that solemn sky.

And again:

Why do I hate that lone green dell?
Buried in moors and mountains wild
This is a spot I had loved too well,
Had I but seen it when a child.

There are bones whitening there in the summer heat:
But it is not for that, and none can tell—
None but one can the secret repeat,
Why I hate that lone green dell.

Noble foe, I pardon thee
All thy cold and scornful pride
For thou wast a priceless friend to me
When my sad heart had none beside.

Let us not read too much in that "I've known it all". The almost naive "purity" of *Wuthering Heights* suggests that, for its authoress, to have loved and have been loved without any bodily fulfilment was to have "known all".

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I knew not 'twas so dire a crime
To say the word Adieu;
But this shall be the only time
My slighted heart shall sue.

The wild moorside, the winter morn,
The gnarled and ancient tree
If in your breast they waken scorn,
Shall wake the same in me.

I can forget black eyes and brows,
And lips of rosy charm,
If you forget the sacred vows
Those faithless lips could form.

If hard commands can tame your love,
Or prison walls can hold,
I would not wish to grieve above
A thing so false and cold.

And, far lovelier than any of these, one that seems to ring
with the rhythm and passion of remembered pain:

Sweet Love of youth, forgive if I forget thee
While the World's tide is bearing me along;
Sterner desires and darker hopes beset me—
Hopes which obscure, but cannot do thee wrong.

No other sun has lightened up my heaven,
No other sun has ever shone for me;
All my life's bliss from thy dear life was given,
All my life's bliss is in the grave with thee.

But when the days of golden dreams had perished,
And even despair was powerless to destroy,
Then did I learn how existence could be cherished,
Strengthened, and fed without the aid of joy.

Then did I check the tears of useless passion,
Weaned my young soul from yearning after thine,
Sternly denied its burning wish to hasten
Down to that tomb already more than mine.

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And even yet I dare not let it languish,
Dare not indulge in memory's rapturous pain;
Once drinking deep of that divinest anguish,
How could I seek the empty world again?

But who Emily's earthly lover, if there was one, may have been, and whether their embrace was in the heather of Haworth Moor or in some lone green dell among the hills around Southowram, we can never know. Emily's earthly lover is a shadow. Her heavenly lover, a little afterwards, was the Invisible.

§

We are on steadier ground when we deduce that while Emily was at Southowram she was impregnated with the first seed of *Wuthering Heights*. The neighbourhood was full of stories—not of political rioting, which did not interest her, but of family loves and hates and treacheries. "Though her feelings for the people round was benevolent," said Charlotte in her Preface to *Wuthering Heights*, "intercourse with them she never sought; nor with very few exceptions ever experienced. And yet she knew them: knew their ways, their language, their family histories; she could hear of them with interest, and talk of them with detail, minute, graphic, and accurate; but *with them* she rarely exchanged a word."

The house itself, Law Hill, was haunted with a story. It had been built, seventy years before, by a coarse, unscrupulous and cruel man (and his narrow ugliness of character is imprinted upon it), a Jack Sharp who had contrived to possess himself of much of his benefactor's property; the man has a smell of Heathcliff. By the house were the farm buildings—had I not stood in the broken mistal out of the rain? Charlotte forgot (she often forgot things in her memoirs) that for six months at least, and probably for sixteen, Emily had lived and worked among farm hands. There may have been a Joseph among the servants at Law Hill. There was certainly a Mrs. Earnshaw; and when Emily used that name, writing ten years after, the whole of Law Hill must have come about her. The country around this highland

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farm was such as she loved: not soft and lush like the Roe Head landscape, but wild moorland and heaving waste. The land is tamed now, but when Emily was there it was largely, as she sings:

Clouds beyond clouds above me,
Wastes beyond wastes below . . .

And it is easy to imagine her seated on some lonely crest, now part of a cottage pasture, and watching the sun's disk sinking red behind the smoke of Halifax.

The mountain peasant loves the heath
Better than richest plains beneath:
He would not give one moorland wild
For all the fields that ever smiled.

Miss Patchett was a woman of some antiquarian interests, as we know from the fact that she would take her girls down the hill to the museum in Halifax, and that she subscribed to John Horner's *Buildings in the Town and Parish of Halifax*, published in 1835, two years before Emily joined her staff as junior mistress; and it is as certain as anything can be that Emily walked, either alone or in the company of headmistress and pupils, to one of the buildings pictured in that book, High Sunderland Hall, for its occupants, the Priestleys, were friends of Miss Patchett's; it stood but two miles away; and it was one of the most fantastic and interesting houses in England.

Walk up the hill on the north-east corner of Halifax, leaving the granite setts and the smoke-black houses behind you; up and up between tumbled dry-stone walls and past the last of the stricken trees; up and up on to the bare, green slopes—well was the place named High, and well Sunderland, for it stands at a height and on land apart—up and up, and there, suddenly, as the cart-track attains a high shoulder, you see, soot-black on the green grass, aloof, lonely, crumbling, and so bizarre in outline and ornament that you doubt your eyes, the ruin of High Sunderland Hall—and yet it is not all a ruin, for two families live in its habitable parts and their geese and hens strut before its gateway and in at its doors. Behind it is the crown of the hill;

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before it a tableland of empty pastures; beneath these the smoke of Halifax. Its stone walls, built about 1630, and culminating in battlements and pinnacles, enclose, like the sides of a box, an ancient timber-framed and gabled house of the fifteenth century. On your right as you approach is the principal gateway which once opened on to a parklike garden now gone back to meadow; but before you examine this portal (and it will make you stare) recall Emily's description of the principal door of Wuthering Heights. "Before passing the threshold, I paused to admire a quantity of grotesque carving lavished over the front and especially about the principal door; above which, among a wilderness of crumbling griffins and shameless little boys, I detected the date '1500' and the name 'Hareton Earnshaw'."

Now over this crumbling gateway of High Sunderland Hall are grinning, impudent baby-faces; the mad statue of a nude man, long moustached and laughing; some armorial bearings and a cherub winding a horn. Issuing from his mouth is a scroll inscribed, *Fama virtutum tuba perennis*: Fame the everlasting trumpet of the virtues; and over the arch, faintly decipherable, the words, *Nunquam hanc pulset portam qui violat aequum*: Let no one who violates justice knock at this portal.

Assuming we are not disqualified, we push open the portal, now a rough and splintering wooden door, and pass through. Above the other side of the archway are two griffins; and over the main house-door, flanking its lintel, two more mad, nightmare nudes, and the inscription, *Hic locus odit, amat, punit, conservat, honorat Nequitiam, pacem, crimina, jura, probos*: This place hates wantonness, loves peace, punishes crimes, observes the laws and honours the just. On the pillars of the door left and right are the words, *Patria domus Optima coelum*: Heaven is the best country, the best home. Over a window on the south front are four Latin hexameters which read, translated, "May the Almighty grant that the race of Sunderland shall quietly inhabit this seat and maintain the rights of their ancestors, free from strife, until an ant drinks up the waters of the sea and a tortoise walks round the whole world."

There is little but silence up here. You can hear the pecking of the poultry, and the bells of Halifax far below. And the blackened and half-ruined hall gazes like a dead thing, left upon

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a high and desolate pasture, at the smoke and vapours of Halifax which are the breath of a new, indifferent, and destroying world.

We can assert with some confidence, I think, that Law Hill and High Sunderland between them gave a first birth to *Wuthering Heights*.

CHAPTER TEN

IN the spring of 1839 the three other children went out in different directions to earn their livings; Emily, we believe, was now at home. Charlotte went a dozen miles north to Stone Gappe, a fine house in Lothersdale, to act as a governess to the children of Mr. and Mrs. John Benson Sidgwick. Branwell went east to Bradford where he took a studio and hoped to make money and fame painting portraits. Anne went twenty miles southward to Blake Hall, near Mirfield, to act as governess to the children of Dr. and Mrs. Ingham.

We need not delay long over these three ventures. Anne passes out of our sight at Blake Hall, unless *Agnes Grey*, at first called *Passages in the Life of an Individual*, is a true picture of her sufferings there; which I find hard to accept since, in the first place, the children in that book are too completely bad to win our belief in them and the parents are too uniformly coarse and cruel, and, in the second, Charlotte told Ellen that Anne was very kindly treated by the Inghams. Branwell painted some portraits and made some friends in Bradford, but there's no doubt that his talent for making friends was in excess of his gift for portrait-painting and that he developed it with more assiduity, in bar-parlours, lodgings, and hospitable studios. His father, hearing of this, cancelled the Bradford experiment and summoned him home. Charlotte's descent upon the Sidgwicks of Stone Gappe produced only mutual bad feeling and much misery for herself, and she was home again in less than three months.

But there was this of importance in that brief visitation: just as Emily at Law Hill, consciously or unconsciously, received the first seeds of *Wuthering Heights*, so Charlotte at Stone Gappe, consciously or unconsciously, absorbed some of the semen that came to fiery life in *Jane Eyre*.

Mr. E. F. Benson in his *Charlotte Brontë* says simply, "she appears from her letters to have fallen among fiends". This is admirable in its hidden satire, for Mr. John Benson Sidgwick was his father's cousin, and we know from Mr. A. C. Benson's

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biography of his father, the Archbishop, that the Benson family thought high things of the Sidgwick family. "Both Mr. and Mrs. John Sidgwick were extraordinarily benevolent people, much beloved," he writes, "and would not wittingly have given pain to anyone connected with them".

Now compare Charlotte's description of her employers, all the most savage parts of which Mr. E. F. Benson quotes without one word of modifying comment, though those who know of the relationship can almost feel the twinkle in his eye.

"DEAREST LAVINIA," writes Charlotte to Emily. . . . "I have striven hard to be pleased with my new situation. The country, the house, and the grounds are, as I have said, divine. But, alack-a-day, there is such a thing as seeing all beautiful around you—pleasant woods, winding white paths, green lawns, and blue, sunshiny sky—and not having a free moment or a free thought left to enjoy them in. The children are constantly with me, and more riotous, perverse, unmanageable cubs never grew. As for correcting them, I soon quickly found that that was entirely out of the question: they are to do as they like. A complaint to Mrs. Sidgwick brings only black looks upon oneself, and unjust partial excuses to screen the children. I have tried that plan once. It succeeded so notably that I shall try it no more. I said in my last letter that Mrs. Sidgwick did not know me. I now begin to find that she does not intend to know me, that she cares nothing in the world about me except to contrive how the greatest possible quantity of labour may be squeezed out of me, and to that end she overwhelms me with oceans of needlework, yards of cambric to hem, muslin night-caps to make, and, above all things, dolls to dress. . . . I see now more clearly than I have ever done before that a private governess has no existence, is not considered as a living and rational being except as connected with the wearisome duties she has to fulfil. . . . Nevertheless, Mrs. Sidgwick is universally considered an amiable woman. Her manners are fussily affable. She talks a great deal, but as it seems to me not much to the purpose. Perhaps I may like her better after a while. At present I have no call to her. Mr. Sidgwick is in my opinion a hundred times better—less profession, less bustling condescension, but a far kinder heart. It is very seldom that he speaks to me, but when

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he does I always feel happier and more settled for some minutes after. He never asks me to wipe the children's smutty noses or tie their shoes or fetch their pinafores or set them on a chair. One of the pleasantest afternoons I have spent here—indeed the only one at all pleasant—was when Mr. Sidgwick walked out with his children, and I had orders to follow a little behind. As he strolled on through the fields with his magnificent Newfoundland dog at his side he looked very like what a frank, wealthy, Conservative gentleman ought to be."

And to Ellen: "If you were near me, perhaps I might be tempted to tell you all, to grow egotistical, and pour out the long history of a private governess's trials and crosses in her first situation. As it is, I will only ask you to imagine the miseries of a reserved wretch like me thrown at once into the midst of a large family, proud as peacocks and wealthy as Jews, at a time when they were particularly gay, when the house was filled with company—all strangers: people whose faces I had never seen before. In this state I had a charge given of a set of horrid children, whom I was expected constantly to amuse, as well as instruct. . . . At first I was for giving all up and going home. But after a little reflection I determined to summon up what energy I had and to weather the storm. I said to myself, 'I have never yet quitted a place without gaining a friend; adversity is a good school; the poor are born to labour, and the dependent to endure.' . . . Mrs. Sidgwick is generally considered an agreeable woman: so she is, I doubt not, in general society. Her health is sound, her animal spirits good, consequently she is cheerful in company. But oh! Ellen, does this compensate for the absence of every fine feeling, of every gentle and delicate sentiment?"

Any lover of *Jane Eyre* will now be hearing echoes in the distance. Here is the governess in the window-seat, listening to the "coarse imbecilities" of the house-party guests, who disregard or despise her. Here is the first of those "Masters" whom she always preferred to the "womanites", and one of whom she was to love and transmute into Mr. Rochester. Here are the far-away voices of Blanche Ingram and her "lady mother".

The drawing-room of Stone Gappe may have provided the setting for Mr. Rochester's house-party, but the house itself is

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almost certainly the chief original of Gateshead Hall, the home of Mrs. Reed and the child Jane Eyre. The truth of this identification is confirmed for me by a single word that Charlotte let fall, unnecessarily and perhaps by accident, in *Jane Eyre*. Stone Gappe is the first house in Lothersdale, and Lothersdale is an alpine village set in a fold of the hills, and on one of the hill-tops is a church that was clean and bright from the quarry when Charlotte, in 1839, was a miserable governess at the big house; for it was dedicated in 1838. And in *Jane Eyre* the heroine, on a visit to Gateshead Hall, says, "Eliza was gone to attend a saint's-day service at the new church."

At Stone Gappe I saw the large bay-windowed rooms, with the seats in the window embrasures. The view from these seats was, as Charlotte wrote, beautiful: the park descending to a wooded dell; the cattle feeding on the peaceful slopes; and the valley of the Lothersdale clearing its way through the hills, beneath the purple and frowning brow of Surgill Head. How often did Charlotte look along that valley towards Keighley and Haworth Moors? On the third floor at the end of a corridor I was shewn a bedroom that may have been the "red room" in which Mr. Reed had died and the child Jane, locked in, had "a species of fit". On the garden terrace was a giant beech tree beneath which, they say, Charlotte used to sit: I saw her there, under the immense spread of its branches, sitting with tight lips and wet eyes, and stitching her rebellion into her hems.

Stitch! Stitch! Stitch! . . .
O men with sisters dear,
O men with mothers and wives!
It is not linen you are wearing out,
But human creatures' lives. . .

Was it under this tree that she wrote to Emily: "Mine bonnie love, I was as glad of your letter as tongue can express; it is a real genuine pleasure to hear from home; a thing to be saved till bed-time, when one has a moment's quiet and rest to enjoy it thoroughly. Write whenever you can. I could like to be at home. I could like to work in a mill. I could like to feel

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some mental liberty. I could like this weight of restraint to be taken off. But the holidays will come. Coraggio."

§

There must have been times when she wondered if she would have done better to accept Mr. Nussey's proposal of marriage. For Ellen's brother, Henry Nussey, only a month or two before, had "made her an offer", and she had declined it, half with laughter, half with regret. Henry Nussey was a solemn and humourless young curate of twenty-seven, who was casting around for a wife to help him in his work. He hoped to take pupils into his house, and a housekeeper would be necessary. Later he hoped to be a missionary, and a wife would be a helpmeet in the mission field. Here again, caught up with her unhappiness at Stone Gappe, is a voice from *Jane Eyre*: for Henry Nussey is the pale, very pale, model for St. John Rivers who needed a helpmeet in India and proposed in cold terms a righteous but loveless marriage to his schoolmistress at Morton. Henry Nussey, from the time he was twelve, kept a diary and his offer to "C.B." is recorded in it alongside of other similar transactions: indeed Mr. Nussey, in his attempts to find a wife, resembles nothing so much as a spring chicken pecking about the yard for a suitable and palatable grain.

"Whoever after my decease," he wrote at twelve years old, "may be led to peruse these pages which have been written or may hereafter be written, I pray them not to read as critics but for profit." Let us then read one or two of the later insertions for profit.

"Saturday, 16 February, 1839. Received a letter from Mr. L., senr., with a negative to my wishes. Thy will, O Lord, be done."

Mr. L. was Mr. Lutwidge, lately his vicar, and he had proposed a marriage with his daughter.

"Monday, 18. Wrote again to M.A.L. and to sister Ellen.

"Thursday, 28. On Tuesday last received a decisive reply from M.A.L.'s papa. A loss but I trust a providential one. Believe not her will, but her father's. All right. God knows best

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what is good for us, for his Church, and for his own glory. This I humbly desire. And His will be done, and not mine in this or in anything else. Evermore give me this spirit of my lord and master. Wrote to Yorke, friend C.B. . . .

“Saturday, 9th March. . . . Received an unfavourable report from C.B. The will of the Lord be done.”

And six months later he wrote to Charlotte that he had become engaged to a Miss Emily Prescott, of Eversley.

This is Charlotte's comment on the proposal, written to his sister Ellen. “I had a kindly leaning towards him, because he is an amiable and well-disposed man. Yet I had not, and could not have, that intense attachment which would make me willing to die for him; and if ever I marry it must be in that light of adoration that I will regard my husband. Ten to one I shall never have the chance again, but *n'importe*. Moreover, I was aware that he knew so little of me he could hardly be conscious to whom he was writing. Why! it would startle him to see me in my natural home character; he would think I was a wild, romantic enthusiast indeed. I could not sit all day long making a grave face before my husband. I would laugh and satirise and say whatever came into my head first. And if he were a clever man, and loved me, the whole world, weighed in the balance against his smallest wish, would be light as air.”

Yes, Charlotte, so painfully shy in company, could laugh and satirise and say wild, happy things at home. And she was hardly home from Stone Gappe before a second proposal of marriage offered a rich occasion for laughter and satire.

“**MY DEAREST ELLEN**—I have an odd circumstance to relate to you—prepare for a hearty laugh! The other day Mr. Hodgson, Papa's former curate, now a vicar, came over to spend the day with us, bringing with him his own curate. The latter gentleman, by name Mr. Price, is a young Irish clergyman, fresh from Dublin University. It was the first time we had any of us seen him, but, however, after the manner of his countrymen, he soon made himself at home. His character quickly appeared in his conversation: witty, lively, ardent, clever too, but deficient in the dignity and discretion of an Englishman. At home, you know, Ellen, I talk with ease, and am never shy, never weighed down and oppressed by that

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miserable *mauvaise honte* which torments and constrains me elsewhere. So I conversed with this Irishman and laughed at his jests, and though I saw faults in his character, excused them because of the amusement his originality afforded. I cooled a little, indeed, and drew in towards the latter part of the evening, because he began to season his conversation with something of Hibernian flattery, which I did not quite relish. However, they went away, and no more was thought about them. A few days after I got a letter, the direction of which puzzled me, it being in a hand I was not accustomed to see. Evidently, it was neither from you nor Mary Taylor, my only correspondents. Having opened and read it, it proved to be a declaration of attachment and proposal of matrimony, expressed in the ardent language of the sapient young Irishman! Well! thought I, I have heard of love at first sight, but this beats all. I leave you to guess what my answer would be, convinced that you will not do me the injustice of guessing wrong. When we meet I'll show you the letter. I hope you are laughing heartily. This is not like one of my adventures, is it? It more nearly resembles Martha Taylor's. I am certainly doomed to be an old maid. Never mind, I made up my mind to that fate ever since I was twelve years old. Write soon. C. BRONTË."

It is easy to read in this that she was glad to have been proposed to a second time, and sad that once again the suitor was not the passionate and all-mastering husband of her heart.

§

There was a further reason why fun and a kind of bubbling excitement should be running high in the parsonage this summer of 1839; for now enters one of the most attractive figures in the Brontës' story; one who earned their affection and their amused, teasing laughter; one who filled their living-room with merriment and gave them some happy, almost hilarious, days—for which we, the friends of the Brontës, must always thank him. His warm vitality and his flying sparks of mischief melted their congealed reserve and set them free to be high-spirited and irreverent and twenty.

The population of Mr. Brontë's chapelry having increased, he was now allowed an assistant curate. In 1830 the Mr. Hodgson mentioned above had acted as a temporary assistant; but now, in 1839, the first regular curate was appointed, the Rev. William Weightman. As Mr. Brontë expressed it in his most pompous style, "I applied to the justly venerated Apostolical Bishop of this diocese, requesting his Lordship to send me a curate adequate to the wants and wishes of the parishioners. This application was not in vain. Our Diocesan, in the scriptural character of the Overlooker and Head of his clergy, made an admirable choice."

The admirable choice, Willy Weightman, was twenty three, fresh from the University of Durham, and only just ordained. In appearance (and these are Charlotte's exact words) he was bonny-faced, with blue eyes, auburn hair, and rosy cheeks. Because of the bonny face and the rosy cheeks the three sisters and Ellen Nussey, who was soon as excited as any of them, called him Celia Amelia. But he was neither foolish nor feminine; "he had classical attainments of the first order, and above all, his religious principles were sound and orthodox," said Mr. Brontë in a sad sermon of which we shall have to speak; but it may be presumed that his Vicar, while fully apprised of his classical attainments, was less well informed about his achievements in the romantic field; and that while he knew all about the young man's orthodox affirmations, he was kept in ignorance of his many unclerical gaieties. He knew all about the young man's excellent brain, but less about his excellent heart, which ached for fun and ignited at the first glimpse of a pretty face in a becoming bonnet. Here was a young man of twenty-three, the bloom of his student days still upon him, tossed into the company of three sisters, aged twenty-three, twenty-one, and nineteen, and a brother one year younger than he. He was promptly sister and brother to them all. Two of the girls had some beauty; Emily with her dark brown hair, colourless face, and magnificent eyes; Anne with her light brown curls, high flush, and transparent porcelain skin; the brother had a liveliness, a sportiveness, and social gifts that equalled his own.

When Mr. Weightman crossed the hall from his Vicar's study, after an elevating discussion on the cure of souls in Haworth,

he shed the parson in the passage and, entering the living-room, became a boy amongst the other children. He exchanged elevation for levity. Perhaps, in reaction from the solemnity of the study, he became uproarious. He sat for his portrait by Charlotte, and was a restless, frivolous, and obstreperous sitter. He showed the girls that he could draw a horse's head without a model. He made other sketches to amuse them, including one of the flying figure of fame inscribing his, Willy Weightman's, name upon the clouds. He recited to their sympathetic and delighted ears the charms of the latest girl with whom he had fallen in love. His eyes sparkled with delight "like a pretty child pleased with a new plaything" (as Charlotte hastens to tell the thrilled Ellen Nussey) when she painted for him a portrait of Agnes Walton, who sat in his heart at the moment. In fact we may say with some exactness that that narrow stone-flagged hallway represented all the difference between sacred and profane love.

He loved them all, these daughters of his parsonage; and when Ellen Nussey arrived there he was attracted by her too. And they loved him, enjoying his weaknesses as much as his liveliness and goodness of heart. Charlotte, whose contempt for curates is one of the most famous facts about her; who dubbed them the Holyes; who described them roundly as "a self-seeking, vain, and empty race"; who declared that she regarded them "one and all as highly uninteresting, narrow, and unattractive specimens of the coarser sex"; Charlotte could not withhold her laughing affection from Willy Weightman, nor keep him out of her letters to Ellen. "I like him very much. I honour and admire his generous, open disposition, and sweet temper—but for all the tricks, wiles, and insincerities of love this gentleman has not his match for twenty miles around." Emily's high and haughty wall fell down before him—and, so far as we know, no one else in her story achieved this remarkable breach. "The first curate at Haworth," says Madame Duclaux, "was exempt from Emily's liberal scorn." He was the only curate whom the parishioners would see walking over the moors with "all t'Vicar's lasses".

Ellen Nussey used to tell how Emily, when out on the moors with Willy Weightman and her sisters, would suddenly

abandon herself to an upsurge of high spirits and break into running and dancing. On one occasion, when he suggested taking Ellen out for a walk in the evening light, Emily, fearing the effect of the evening light on Mr. Weightman, insisted on accompanying them as a chaperone; which secured for her the nickname of "The Major". Anne, it is held by some, was in love with him; she was certainly demurely touched when, in the intervals of being in love with girls in Ripon, Swansea, Keighley, and Appleby, he was, by all the signs and portents, in love with her. "His young reverence, as you tenderly call him, is looking delicate and pale," Charlotte reports to Ellen. "He sits opposite Anne at church, sighing softly, and looking out of the corners of his eyes to win her attention, and Anne is so quiet, her look so downcast, they are a picture." Branwell called him "one of my dearest friends". Ellen was on the brink of being in love with him, but Charlotte, her guardian and manageress, stayed her from the fall. "I know Mrs. Ellen is burning to hear something about William Weightman. I think I'll plague her by not telling her a word. To speak heaven's truth, I have precious little to say, inasmuch as I seldom see him, except on a Sunday, when he looks as handsome, cheery, and good-tempered as usual. I have indeed had the advantage of one long conversation since his return from Westmorland, when he poured out his whole warm fickle soul in fondness and admiration of Agnes Walton." Even with Aunt Branwell he was a favourite; and when she heard his voice in the living-room below she would come downstairs, with her sewing and her snuff-box and her enormous cap, because she enjoyed his teasing laughter and impudent sallies.

Charlotte's letters and Ellen's records abound with evidences of his rollicking spirits and quick generosity. When he learned that none of the girls had ever received a valentine he went away, composed amorous verses for each of them, and walked ten miles into Bradford and back that they might be posted from there. Charlotte adjures Ellen to tell Mary Taylor, who was also very curious about this Celia Amelia, and angry at having been left in the dark—to tell her forthwith "every individual occurrence, including valentines, 'Fair E——, Fair E——', etc.; 'Away fond love', etc.; 'Soul divine', and

all; likewise the painting of Celia Amelia's portrait and that young lady's frequent and agreeable visits." There was the visit of Mr. William Morgan, their father's best friend, who had baptised most of them. "Mr. Morgan came and stayed three days. By Miss Weightman's aid, we got on pretty well. It was amazing to see with what patience and good temper the innocent creature endured the fat Welshman's prosing, though she confessed afterwards that she was almost done up by his long stories."

There was the lecture on the Classics which Mr. Weightman delivered in Keighley. He was resolute that the girls should attend it and having impressed into his service a married clergyman to act as chaperon and cloak the jaunt with propriety, he brought the whole party home at midnight to the embarrassment of Aunt Branwell who had provided coffee for only three. For once in a way she lost her temper with Mr. Weightman and was very cross with him; the more so that he refused to be chastened and maintained his "twinkling fun".

When he was away from Haworth his gifts poured into the parsonage for his playmates there; Charlotte gives us a regular bill of lading: "a brace of wild ducks, a brace of black grouse, a brace of partridges, ditto of snipe, ditto of curlews, and a large salmon". And it was not only to his familiar friends that he was generous; when Susan Bland, one of Charlotte's Sunday School scholars, was dying, his heart, usually so buoyant, and indeed air-borne, sank at the sight of her into deep despondency and he went away and returned with a bottle of wine and a jar of preserves.

One who was so prodigal with his money we can forgive for having been a spendthrift of his love. "Mr. Weightman is better in health; but don't set your heart on him," Charlotte conjures Ellen; "I'm afraid he is very fickle—not to you in particular, but to half a dozen other ladies. He has just cut his *inamorata* at Swansea, and sent her back all her letters. His present object of devotion is Caroline Dury"—the daughter of the vicar of Keighley—"to whom he has just despatched a most passionate copy of verses. Poor lad, his sanguine temperament bothers him grievously."

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The flying figure of Fame did not inscribe Willy Weightman's name on the clouds, for he died at the age of twenty-six, after being only three years a curate at Haworth; but it has inscribed it in very pleasant characters on the margin of the Brontës' story. Mr. Brontë visited him twice a day as he lay dying; and Branwell watched by his bed. Mr. Brontë preached his funeral sermon to a congregation that crowded the church, for all the people had loved him; he published the sermon, and it is from it that I have quoted. They buried him beneath the north aisle of the church and put up a memorial tablet to him on the north wall; and some time afterwards Anne wrote a poem, about which we can think what we will.

Yes, thou art gone! and never more
Thy sunny smile shall gladden me;
But I may pass the old church door,
And pace the floor that covers thee.

May stand upon the cold, damp stone
And think that, frozen, lies below
The lightest heart that I have known,
The kindest I shall ever know.

When the old honest church, except for its tower, was demolished in 1879, and the new meaningless structure of ready-made Gothic replaced it, the vicar caused the memorial to all the Brontës to be moved from its honourable place on the right of the altar to a humbler position at the west end, and consigned the mural to William Weightman to the dark obscurity of the baptistry, under the tower. Mr. Brontë's old wooden three-decker pulpit was cast forth and lay disregarded for years in a hay-loft at Stanbury. (Its upper part is used now as the pulpit of the little Stanbury church, and its sounding-board stands against the wall in the gloom of the Haworth baptistry, two steps from the Weightman memorial.) It is difficult to acquit the then Vicar, the Rev. J. Wade, who succeeded Mr. Brontë, of some jealousy of his more famous predecessor and his famous children: he declared in a sermon once that his duty in that parish was not to maintain a show place for strangers, but a house of prayer for the praise of God—

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which is a smart and poor defence. for all the cathedrals of the world are both these things. I had to strike a match to find in the dark baptistry the people's tribute of love to Willy Weightman. I had to hold up match after match while I read:

This Monument
was erected by the Inhabitants
in Memory of the Late
WILLIAM WEIGHTMAN
Who died September 6th, 1842, aged 26 yrs
And was buried in this church
On the tenth of the same month.
He was three years Curate of Haworth
And by the congregation and parishioners
In general was greatly respected
For his orthodox principles, active zeal,
moral habits, learning,
mildness and affability.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

AMONG the papers and remains which in 1895 Mr. Nicholls, then nearly eighty and feeling, I suppose, that his time was at hand, gave to Mr. Clement Shorter there was a tin box about two inches long which he had found at the bottom of a desk. In this box, Mr. Shorter tells us, were four little pieces of paper folded to the size of a sixpence. Opened out, they showed the minute handwriting or “print” of Emily and Anne; two written by Emily, two by Anne. These two bosom-sisters had a secret arrangement that once every four years, and on Emily’s birthday, each would write, wherever she might be, a record of past events and present hopes, to be opened by both four years later. The four folded papers in the little box were these Emily-Anne records, written in 1841 and 1845. So once again we have a clear and authentic light on the parsonage and its people in the year 1841; and it is interesting to note that in Emily’s view, Victoria and Adelaide, the geese, Keeper the dog, half mastiff, half bulldog, and Hero, her merlin hawk, are almost as important as the human residents. The fat geese, it is to be remarked, have the names of the two living Queens. Let me also point out that the Brontës always called their father’s study the “parlour”, and their living-room across the passage the “dining-room”. For the rest of this book I shall refer to the one as the study and the other as the living-room.

A PAPER to be opened
when Anne is
25 years old,
or my next birthday after
if
all be well.

Emily Jane Brontë. July the 30th, 1841.

“It is Friday evening, near 9 o’clock—wild rainy weather. I am seated in the dining-room, having just concluded tidying our desk boxes, writing this document. Papa is in the parlour—*aunt* upstairs in her room. She has been reading *Blackwood’s*

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Magazine to Papa. Victoria and Adelaide are ensconced in the peat-house. Keeper is in the kitchen—Hero in his cage. We are all stout and hearty, as I hope is the case with Charlotte, Branwell, and Anne, of whom the first is at John White, Esq., Upperwood House, Rawdon; the second is at Luddenden Foot; and the third is, I believe, at Scarborough, editing perhaps a paper corresponding to this.

“A scheme is at present in agitation for setting us up in a school of our own; as yet nothing is determined, but I hope and trust it may go on and prosper and answer our highest expectations. This day four years I wonder whether we shall still be dragging on in our present condition or established to our hearts’ content. Time will show.

“I guess that at the time appointed for the opening of this paper we, i.e. Charlotte, Anne, and I, shall be all merrily seated in our own sitting-room in some pleasant and flourishing seminary, having just gathered in for the midsummer ladyday. Our debts will be paid off, and we shall have cash in hand to a considerable amount. Papa, Aunt, and Branwell will either have been or be coming to visit us. It will be a fine warm summer evening, very different from this bleak look-out, and Anne and I will perchance slip out into the garden for a few minutes to peruse our papers. I hope either this or something better will be the case.

“The Gondalians are at present in a threatening state, but there is no open rupture as yet. All the princes and princesses of the Royalty are at the Palace of Instruction. I have a good many books on hand, but I am sorry to say that as usual I make small progress with any. However, I have just made a new regularity paper! and I mean *verb sap* to do great things. And now I close, sending from far an exhortation of courage, boys! courage, to exiled and harassed Anne, wishing she was here.”

The remarkable thing about Anne’s paper, written from the other side of Yorkshire, is its almost perfect parallelism with her much-loved elder sister’s. She begins, just as Emily does, by saying that Charlotte is a governess at Mr. White’s, Branwell a clerk in the railway station at Luddenden Foot, and she herself at Scarborough; she continues, “We are thinking of setting up a school of our own”; she wonders where they will

all be four years hence; she wonders whether the Gondalians will still be flourishing; she states that she has a book on hand, the fourth volume of *Solala Vernon's Life*; and she concludes with Emily's words, "Time will show".

Emily's paper was written for Anne's eye only; her poems of this period for the eye of no one at all. But we have them now, and they show that her paper was the happy and humorous mask she wore before them all—even before Anne. In the paper there is no whisper from the brooding creator of *Wuthering Heights*; no word from the young mystic who was seeking to lose herself, and find herself, in the embrace of the Absolute; no sound from her

—whose soul
Knew no fellow for might,
Passion, vehemence, grief
Daring, since Byron died.

But these notes are ringing in her verses now. She was alone in the house; Charlotte, Anne, and Branwell all away. Her bedroom was the narrow whitewashed box-room, and here she slept, or lay awake, composing poems, with her father asleep beyond one wall and her aunt beyond the other. The bed lay along the window, as we see from a vignette she sketched at the bottom of her paper for 1845. From that bed she could look out upon the garden, the tombstones, and the distant moor, while the wind invested the house, sudden and quick in bombardment, or went straying around and about it, wailing for want of a goal.

In a poem dated May 1841 we have the challenge of the earth to its lover, Emily—perhaps after her temporary desertion to a human lover.

Shall Earth no more inspire thee,
Thou lonely dreamer now?
Since passion may not fire thee,
Shall nature cease to bow?

Thy mind is ever moving
In regions dark to thee;
Recall its useless roving,
Come back and dwell with me. . .

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Few hearts to mortals given
On earth so wildly pine;
Yet none would ask a Heaven
More like the Earth than thine.

Then let my winds caress thee;
Thy comrade let me be:
Since nought beside can bless thee,
Return and dwell with me.

And in a poem written only thirteen days before the cheerful
birthday paper we have her answer to this challenge of the earth.

I see around me tombstones grey
Stretching their shadows far away.
Beneath the turf my footsteps tread
Lie low and lone the silent dead;
Beneath the turf, beneath the mould,
For ever dark, for ever cold,
And my eyes cannot hold the tears
That memory hoards from vanished years;
For time and death and mortal pain
Give wounds that will not heal again.

Let me remember half the woe
I've seen and heard and felt below,
And Heaven itself, so pure and blest,
Could never give my spirit rest. . . .

We would not leave our native home
For any world beyond the tomb.
No rather on thy kindly breast
Let us be laid in lasting rest;
Or waken but to share with thee
A mutual immortality.

This is a whisper of the wind from *Wuthering Heights*; it is Catherine Earnshaw crying to Nelly Dean: "I was only going to say that Heaven did not seem to be my home; and I broke my heart with weeping to come back to earth; and the angels were so angry that they flung me out into the middle of the heath on the top of Wuthering Heights; where I woke sobbing for joy."

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And in the following stanzas, as Charlotte herself says in her edition of Emily's poems, "a louder gale has roused the sleeper on her pillow", and she addresses herself:

Yes—I could swear that glorious wind
Has swept the world aside,
Has dashed its memory from thy mind
Like foam-bells from the tide.

And thou art now a spirit pouring
Thy presence into all:
The thunder of the tempest's roaring
The whisper of its fall:

An universal influence
From thine own influence free;
A principle of life—intense—
Lost to mortality.

Thus truly, when that breast is cold,
Thy prisoned soul shall rise,
The dungeon mingle with the mould
The captive with the skies.
Nature's deep being thine shall hold,
Her spirit all thy spirit fold,
Her breath absorb thy sighs.
Mortal! though soon life's tale is told,
Who once lives, never dies!

This is the first fine stammer of the voice that sang so surely at the last:

There is not room for Death,
Nor atom that his might could render void;
Thou—Thou art Being and Breath
And what Thou art may never be destroyed.

§

Exiled and harassed Anne had gone as governess in the household of the Rev. and Mrs. Edmund Robinson at Thorp

Green in the vale of York; and in these summer days she was with the family at Scarborough. As before, she dwells out of our sight, farther away from the parsonage than the other children. The least rebellious of the sisters, she remained four years with the Robinsons; and we cannot see her among them till the closing days of her last year. Then in an unexpected and ugly last act, a dénouement that involved in stark conflict Mr. Robinson, Mrs. Robinson, Branwell, and the frightened and shuddering Anne, this family at Thorp Green becomes vivid for a day. But this climax lay four years ahead in July 1845. It broke a few days before the 1841 birthday papers were to be opened. "Time will show."

In January 1840 Branwell had gone as tutor in the family of a Mr. Postlethwaite, at Broughton-in-Furness; and in March he wrote a jovial letter to his neighbour and friend, the Worshipful Master of the Lodge at the "Black Bull", John Brown, sexton and stonemason. This letter has been so often quoted, reprinted, and discussed that we may at least claim for Branwell that he left one classic piece of writing. And the censures that have been heaped upon it are so extravagant in their language that one can only assign to them an unseen and irrational root, such as the need to heighten the beauty of the sisters by darkening the shadow of their brother. Madame Duclaux, Emily's first biographer, introduces it with the bitter comment that it shows "what things in life seemed desirable and worthy of attainment to this much-hoped-in brother of the austere Emily, the courageous Charlotte, the pious Anne". A modern biographer, Flora Masson, calls it "vicious, hypocritical and utterly selfish". And as for Swinburne he visited the writer of the letter with (I quote Leyland, Branwell's defending counsel) "the full and unmitigated volume of his vocabulary of abuse".

Well, consider the letter.

"**OLD KNAVE OF TRUMPS**—Don't think I have forgotten you, though I have delayed so long in writing to you. It was my purpose to send you a yarn as soon as I could find materials to spin one with, and it is only just now that I have had time to turn myself round and know where I am. If you saw me now you would not know me, and you would laugh to hear the character the people give me. Oh, the falsehood and hypocrisy

of this world! I am fixed in a little retired town by the sea-shore, among wild woody hills that rise round me—huge, rocky, and capped with clouds. My employer is a retired county magistrate, a large landowner, and of a right hearty and generous disposition. His wife is a quiet, silent, and amiable woman, and his sons are two fine, spirited lads. My landlord is a respectable surgeon, and six days out of seven is as drunk as a lord! His wife is a bustling, chattering, kind-hearted soul; and his daughter!—oh! death and damnation! Well, what am I? That is, what do they think I am? A most calm, sedate, sober, abstemious, patient, mild-hearted, virtuous, gentlemanly philosopher—the picture of good works, and the treasure-house of righteous thoughts. Cards are shuffled under the table-cloth, glasses are thrust into the cupboard, if I enter the room. I take neither spirits, wine, nor malt liquors. I dress in black, and smile like a saint or martyr. Everybody says, 'What a good young gentleman is Mr. Postlethwaite's tutor!' This is fact, as I am a living soul, and right comfortably do I laugh at them. I mean to continue in their good opinion. I took a half-year's farewell of old friend whisky at Kendal on the night after I left. There was a party of gentlemen at the Royal Hotel, and I joined them. We ordered in supper and whisky-toddy as 'hot as hell!' They thought I was a physician, and put me in the chair. I gave sundry toasts, that were washed down at the same time, till the room spun round and the candles danced in our eyes. One of the guests was a respectable old gentleman with powdered head, rosy cheeks, fat paunch, and ringed fingers. He gave 'The Ladies', after which he brayed off with a speech; and in two minutes, in the middle of a grand sentence, he stopped, wiped his head, looked wildly round, stammered, coughed, stopped again, and called for his slippers. The waiter helped him to bed. Next a tall Irish squire and a native of the land of Israel began to quarrel about their countries; and, in the warmth of argument, discharged their glasses, each at his neighbour's throat instead of his own. I recommended bleeding, purging, and blistering; but they administered each other a real 'Jem Warder', so I flung my tumbler on the floor too, and swore I'd join 'Old Ireland'! A regular rumpus ensued, but we were tamed at last. I found myself in bed next morning, with a bottle of porter, a glass, and

a corkscrew beside me. Since then I have not tasted anything stronger than milk-and-water, nor, I hope, shall, till I return at Midsummer; when we will see about it. I am getting as fat as Prince William at Springhead, and as godly as his friend, Parson Winterbotham. My hand shakes no longer. I ride to the banker's at Ulverston with Mr. Postlethwaite, and sit drinking tea and talking scandal with old ladies. As to the young ones! I have one sitting by me just now—fair-faced, blue-eyed, dark-haired, sweet eighteen—she little thinks the devil is so near her!

“I was delighted to see thy note, old squire, but I do not understand one sentence—you will perhaps know what I mean. . . . How are all about you? I long to hear and see them again. How is the ‘Devil’s Thumb’, whom men call — — —, and the ‘Devil in Mourning’, whom they call — — —, and — — —, and the Doctor; and him who will be used as the tongs of hell—he whose eyes Satan looks out of, as from windows—I mean — — —, esquire? How are little — — —, — — ‘Longshanks’, — — —, and the rest of them? Are they married, buried, devilled, and damned? When I come I’ll give them a good squeeze of the hand; till then I am too godly for them to think of. That bow-legged devil used to ask me impertinent questions which I answered him in kind. Beelzebub will make of him a walking-stick! Keep to thy teetotalism, old squire, till I return; it will mend thy old body. . . . Does ‘Little Nosey’ think I have forgotten him? No, by Jupiter! nor his clock either. I’ll send him a remembrancer some of these days! But I must talk to some one prettier than thee; so good night, old boy, and Believe me thine, THE PHILOSOPHER.

“Write directly. Of course you won’t show this letter; and, for Heaven’s sake, blot out all the lines scored with red ink.”

Now if we allow that young men of twenty-two sometimes make a night of it, finishing up with a roughhouse and waking up in the morning with a hangover; that they have an eye for a pretty face and are prone to warm words about it; that they enjoy a trifle of braggartry and like to sing occasionally “Drink and the devil had done for the rest, Yo-ho-ho, and a bottle of rum!”; and if we do not incontinently condemn them for this, whether they sit in service messes or medical students’ houses,

why then I find in this letter, not only a youthful and therefore venial braggadocio, and not only a talent for racy and vigorous narrative, but also much good-nature, bonhomie, and covert affection, together with symptoms of a congenital decency. It is certainly not time to condemn him yet. I submit that so far he has behaved no worse than Swinburne who was not exempt from the weakness of desiring to shock or immune from self-indulgence and sin.

§

Returning from Broughton-in-Furness after a few months—at his father's wish, we are told—Branwell made great efforts to get employment on the new Leeds and Manchester Railway, later known as the Lancashire and Yorkshire Railway. He succeeded, securing the post of booking-clerk at Sowerby Bridge Station near Halifax. Mr. E. F. Benson describes this appointment as a “dismal degringolade” for a boy of whom so much had been hoped, and who had hoped so much for himself. But surely this is to forget that characters are woven of many strands and a boy in 1840 must have been as fascinated by the new railways and engines as a boy of our generation by aerodromes and aeroplanes. Nor was Branwell the first to take up a salaried task until such time as his literary work should promise him a livelihood.

Leyland offers another reason for this move to Sowerby Bridge, and it carries conviction: he suggests that Branwell was anxious to escape from the intellectual emptiness of Haworth and get nearer to his literary and artistic friends in Halifax and Bradford.

So Branwell moved to his booking-office at Sowerby Bridge, and it was here that Leyland first met him, in the company of his brother, J. B. Leyland, the sculptor. He describes him as of gentlemanlike appearance; in stature a little below middle height; slim and agile in figure, and with a clear and ruddy complexion and a voice of ringing sweetness, whose utterance and use of English were perfect. He was in excellent spirits, and showed no traces as yet, in mien or manner, of intemperance and deterioration.

But after three months at Sowerby Bridge he was transferred

to a new station, a mile up the line, at Luddenden Foot. This station was no more than a wooden hut and platforms, and here he seems to have combined the positions of station-master and booking-clerk, with a single porter for his staff: Charlotte regarded it as a promotion. A few minutes' walk from the station was the ancient village of Luddenden Foot with its population of weavers and mill-hands and its two hostelries, the "Red Lion" and the "Shuttle and Anchor". Francis Grundy, an assistant engineer on the line, first made his acquaintance at Luddenden Foot and liked him well enough to do his part later in the fight for a fairer assessment of Branwell. In his *Pictures of the Past* he writes of Luddenden Foot, "Had a position been chosen for this strange creature, for the express purpose of driving him several steps to the bad, this must have been it."

Even now the station of "Luddendenfoot" is little more than a wooden building recessed beneath a green escarpment like a cliff. Dank and sooty walls buttress and contain the cliff; and beneath it the cinders of the platform, where it is not flagged with local stone, are green with moss. An old signal cabin, long deserted, does duty now as a platelayer's hut. The soiled waters of the Calder amble past the goods yard and sidings from which old notices of the "Lancashire and Yorkshire Railway" still warn you off, with menaces of prosecution and a fine of forty shillings. The place is indeed a "Foot" for patch-work hills crowd in on every side, and the mills and factories huddle in this deep bottom by the water.

I chatted with a single porter, a successor of Branwell's porter; and he said to me, "Aye, ah've heard that Reverend Brontë's lad were a booking-clerk here." The great trains of today passed through and I pictured the tawny headed "station-master" of a hundred years ago running out from his office to watch the old four-wheeled engines panting by, with their long chimneys, low, cylindrical boilers, and driver and fireman standing on an uncovered footplate. I'm sure he exchanged a wave with these able and interesting men.

But it is evident that after a time Branwell was even more bored at Luddenden Foot than ever he had been at Haworth. Sometimes he would hire a gig and drive over the moors to see the family again; often he wandered alone about the hills, on

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whose sides and summits there was beauty again; sometimes he walked up the valley towards the loveliness that was to be found at Hebden Bridge, Heptonstall, and Todmorden. In wearier times he sat in the taverns and drank alone: at the "Lord Nelson" in Luddenden village they show you "Branwell's chair", just as they do at the "Black Bull" in Haworth. In a kindly passage Grundy describes him as no domestic demon, but just a man moving in a mist, who lost his way.

A little incident that shows his condition at this time—his dejection, the hunger of his heart, his touchiness, his belief in himself as a writer, and his modicum of talent—is reported to us by Grundy. "On one occasion he thought I was disposed to treat him distantly at a party, and he retired in great dudgeon. When I arrived at my lodging the same evening I found the following, necessarily an impromptu"—and Grundy quotes a poem of which the closing lines are:

However mean a man may be,
Know man *is* man as well as thee;
However high thy gentle line,
Know he who writes can rank with thine;
And though his frame be worn and dead,
Some light still glitters round his head.

Yes! though his tottering limbs seem old,
His heart and blood are not yet cold.
Hark, Grundy! shun his evil ways,
His restless nights, his troubled days;
But never slight his mind, which flies,
Instinct with noble sympathies,
Afar from spleen and treachery,
To thought, to kindness, and to thee.

P. B. BRONTË.

There is no doubt that he was often drunk now. And it is probable that at this time he began his experiments with opium; but before this astonishes us too much we must remember that opium-eating was almost a fashion among writers he admired such as Coleridge and De Quincey; and, again, that it was believed to have a potency against consumption, of which two of his sisters had died. With that tendency to dejection and

**Guisely
Church**

**Garden
and Berceau,
Pensionnat
Heger, Brussels**

ve of M. and Mme Heger

Detail of Grave

morbid exaggeration which declared itself in all the surviving Brontë children he used to say afterwards that at Luddenden Foot he was a miserable wreck, requiring six glasses of whisky to stimulate him, and almost insane. Charlotte, Anne, and Emily might have said they were almost insane, but whatever depths of religious melancholy Charlotte and Anne might reach, whatever cosmic despairs might sink the heart of Emily, their governing sanity controlled them from such verbal excesses as the following, "I would rather give my hand than undergo again the grovelling carelessness, the malignant yet cold debauchery, the determination to find how far mind could carry body without both being chucked into hell." These are the words of a brain that is becoming unseated.

It was at Luddenden Foot that he began to go to pieces. He lost all interest in his work and all hope in himself. He left the station accounts to the porter and the time came when an audit of the accounts showed that they did not tally. Money was missing. Branwell was discharged from the service of the Railway Company, not for peculations, which were credited to the porter, but for neglect of duty. An inevitable and proper dismissal, but we can feel some pity for this bored and defeated boy when we read that the officials, examining his books, were shocked to find on their margins sketches of famous pugilists and local celebrities, and that Mr. Shorter, having acquired a memorandum book which belonged to Branwell at Luddenden Foot, found in it notes and statistics about railways and engines and, side by side with them, verses about Robert Burns, Lord Nelson, Dr. Johnson, and others of his heroes.

§

"The first is at John White, Esq., Upperwood House, Rawdon." Charlotte, restless at having no remunerative work, anxious about her father's eyesight, health, and age, healed for a while of the sickening memory of Stone Gappe and the Sidgwicks, and determined to fortify the position somehow, had been applying in many quarters for a new situation as governess. Ponder these quotations from her letters to Ellen, if you would know Charlotte. "My motto is 'try again'"; "I told you some time since that I meant to get a situation, and when I said so,

As we have learned from the Emily-Anne papers the project of starting their own school was much in the minds of the sisters this summer of 1841. Their aunt was ready to advance them a hundred pounds if she was satisfied that the project had a good chance of success. Miss Wooler had even suggested that Charlotte should take over and restore her failing school at Dewsbury Moor, but from this Charlotte recoiled, because Dewsbury Moor was a "poisoned place" for her. Still, as she says to Ellen, "it was a decent, friendly proposal on Miss Wooler's part, and cancels all or most of her little foibles". Miss Wooler seems to have forgotten the little éclaircissement more easily than Charlotte.

Charlotte also felt that she and her sisters needed to know more, to have better qualifications, to perfect themselves in French and German, before they could set up as mistresses of their own school; and her brain, like a dog's teeth, gripped and worried the question how this was to be achieved. And then on an August day a letter came from Mary Taylor who with her sister was at school in Brussels; and the fatal name was mentioned. It lay under her eyes. Brussels.

"Mary's letters spoke of some of the pictures and cathedrals she had seen—pictures the most exquisite, cathedrals the most venerable. I hardly know what swelled to my throat as I read her letter: such a vehement impatience of restraint and steady work; such a strong wish for wings—wings such as wealth can furnish; such an urgent thirst to see, to know, to learn, something internal seemed to expand bodily for a minute." Those words are inspired; and, further inspired, she wrote an extraordinarily skilful and subtle letter to her aunt suggesting that some of the hundred pounds should be devoted to sending Emily and herself to "some school on the continent". "I would not go to France or to Paris. I would go to Brussels, in Belgium. . . . I feel an absolute conviction that if this advantage were allowed us it would be the making of us for life. Papa will, perhaps, think it a wild and ambitious scheme; but whoever rose in the world without ambition? When he left Ireland to go to Cambridge University he was as ambitious as I am now. I want us *all* to get on."

And Aunt Branwell consented; Mr. Brontë consented; Emily

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consented; and the wings were under Charlotte again, lifting her for the flight. Everything that she had always desired seemed to be there before her: adventure, experience, culture; the sea, a foreign land, palaces; parks, cathedrals, art galleries, and concert halls; famous men, brilliant people, and fine talk. "I burn to go somewhere else. I think, Nell, I see chance of going to Brussels. . . . Brussels is my promised land."

Go forth, Charlotte. You are completely right in thinking that Brussels will fit you for your part; but not the part of a schoolmistress. It will feed you with a full measure; it will nourish and enlarge you; it will give you all the passion, the pain, and the rebellion that is in *Jane Eyre*, *Shirley*, and *Villette*.

CHAPTER TWELVE

A TALL, white old man in a high white cravat, a tall, slim, rather angular girl of twenty-three, and a much smaller girl of twenty-five stood on the pavement outside the main door of a house in the Rue d'Isabelle, Brussels. Mr. Brontë had brought his two daughters from their gate at Haworth to this door. It may^{inu} that another clergyman, Mr. Jenkins, the chaplain at the Brit^{ms} Embassy, was with the party, for he and his wife had undertaken to give the young ladies "respectable protection" in this foreign land. The Rue d'Isabelle was a long, narrow, curving street, and the house, very long too, occupied a large part of one side of it. On the door was a brass plate, "Pensionnat de Demoiselles". Perhaps, while they waited there, some of the demoiselles, *externats*, came out of the school in their little close French bonnets and swaying crinolines.

The aims and atmosphere of the pensionnat are sufficiently shewn by the prospectus which Mr. Brontë and Aunt Branwell had studied. "Maison d'Éducation Pour les jeunes Demoiselles, Sous la direction de Madame Heger Parent. . . . Cet établissement est situé dans l'endroit le plus salubre de la ville. Le cours d'instruction, basé sur la Religion, comprend essentiellement la Langue Française, l'Histoire, l'Arithmétique, la Géographie, L'Écriture, ainsi que tous les ouvrages à l'aiguille que doit connaître une demoiselle bien élevée." The fees were 650 francs, or £26, a year.

If *Villette* is, as most believe, photographic in its faithfulness to external detail, the little party was shewn into a cold, glittering salon with gilded ornaments, polished floor, and a porcelain stove. And here Madame Heger, the directrice (Parent was her maiden name), came sailing in to greet them; a short, stout but graceful woman of thirty-six, with a fresh, sanguine complexion and serene blue eyes; dressed in a dark silk dress that fitted as only a French sempstress can make a dress fit. She had, so a lady in Brussels told Mrs. Gaskell, "quelque chose de froid et de compassé dans son maintien"; but the photographs of her when she was old show a face of much sweetness. I suppose she shook

Charlotte by the hand. Did she know what she was welcoming within her walls—a very small, inordinately shy, and distressingly nervous young woman who, with a pen refined to a needle's point and dipped in black bile, would distort her face for generations to come. It was always a dangerous, and usually a terrible, thing, to take this Mlle Brontë into your house as pupil or governess.

Mr. Brontë, with his customary stateliness and courtesy, left his daughters in her charge, and returned next day to Haworth.

I do not know when Charlotte and Emily first met M. Constantin Heger, Madame's husband, professor at the neighbouring Athénée Royal and teacher of rhetoric at the pensionnat; but this was a meeting of even greater moment. Here is the man who, beyond any doubt now, was the principal factor in Charlotte's life and, almost as certainly, no small factor in Emily's. Here is the man who lodges in all Charlotte's swart "foreign" heroes: Mr. Rochester, Monsieur Pelet, Robert Moore, and Monsieur Paul Emmanuel. He is thirty-one, seven years older than Charlotte, and five years younger than his wife. "There is one individual of whom I have not yet spoken," writes Charlotte to Ellen: "M. Heger, the husband of Madame. He is professor of rhetoric, a man of power as to mind but very choleric and irritable as to temperament"—and there Mrs. Gaskell places a full stop. It is a very discreet full stop, for M. Heger was very much alive when she wrote her *Life*, and the original letter from which she was quoting went on with a semi-colon and the words, "a little black being with a face that varies in expression. Sometimes he borrows the lineaments of an insane tom-cat, sometimes those of a delirious hyena, occasionally but very seldom he discards these perilous attractions and assumes an air not above 100 degrees removed from mild and gentlemanlike." One is reminded at once of Keats' first mention in his letters of Fanny Brawne, who was to lay waste his life with love of her: pretending indifference and disapproval he describes her as "beautiful and elegant, graceful, silly, fashionable, and strange—we have a little tiff now and then—and she behaves a little better, or I must have sheered off".

M. Paul Emmanuel came to such a violent and vibrating life

of his own in the pages of *Villette* that he stands between us and a true picture of M. Heger; so it is of much interest to have the report of another English girl who, some eighteen years after Charlotte and Emily, went as a pupil to the pensionnat in the Rue d'Isabelle. Miss Frederika Macdonald in her "Some Reminiscences of the Real Monsieur and Madame Heger" describes his appearance as "like a priest" and "like Punch"; states that his methods were "not so much of arguing as dispensing with argument"; and gives us a scene that equals the best of *Villette*. Frederika, then about fifteen, had come to grief with her arithmetic in what seems to have been a demonstration lesson by M. Heger before all the girls and all the governesses. All the girls had dissatisfied him with their answers, and now Frederika shocked him most of all. He first turned to Madame Heger and said abominable things of the whole English race and then attacked the assembled class.

"He did not leave off till the whole Galerie was a house of mourning. In the whole place the only dry eyes were mine. . . . The place rang with their sobs. . . . It was really a bewildering and almost maddening thing, because on all sides it was so absurd. First of all, what had all these weeping girls done to deserve the reproaches the Professor heaped upon them? 'They said to themselves,' he told them: 'What does this old Papa-Heger matter? Let him sit up at night, let him get up early, let him spend all his days in thinking how he can serve *us*, make difficulties light, and dark things clear to *us*. *We* are not going to take any trouble on our side, not *we*! Why should *we*. Indeed it amuses *us* to see him *navré*—for *us* it is a good farce.'"

"The wail rose up—'Mais non, Monsieur, ce n'est pas vrai, cela ne nous amuse pas; nous sommes tristes, nous pleurons, voyez.'

"The Professor took no heed; he continued: 'They said to themselves, "Ah! the old man, le pauvre vieux"—he was then fifty-one—"takes an interest in *us*, he loves *us*; it pleases him to think when he is dead, and has disappeared, these little pupils whom he has tried to render intelligent, and well-instructed, and adorned with gifts of the mind, will think of his lessons, and wish they had been more attentive. Foolish old thing! Not

at all," they say, "as if we had any care for him or his lessons."'

"The wail rose up—'Ce n'est pas gentil ce que vous dites là, Monsieur; nous avons beaucoup de respect pour vous, nous aimons vos leçons; oui, nous travaillerons bien, vous allez voir, pardonnez-nous.'"

And after this uproar he took Frederika up to his library and very tenderly explained her difficulty with integers and fractions, using for demonstration some macaroon biscuits and half a Brioche cake.

"The funny and pleasant thing about M. Heger," continues Miss Macdonald, "was that he was so fond of teaching, and so truly in his element when he began it, that his temper became sweet at once; and I loved his face when it got the look upon it that came in lesson hours: so that, whereas we were hating each other when we crossed the threshold of the door, we liked each other very much when we sat down to the table; and I had an excited feeling that he was going to make me understand. . . . It was not, however, in rescuing one from the slough of despond that M. Heger excelled—it was rather in calling out one's best faculties; in stimulating one's natural gifts, in lifting one above satisfaction with mediocrity; in fastening one's attention on models of perfection; in inspiring one with a sense of reverence and love for them, that M. Heger's peculiar talent lay."

To such methods, blending scholarship, dictatorship, fury, and gentleness, Charlotte yielded with delight. Here at last was the Master—the golden Master, let us say, for she flew into the midst of him like a fly into golden honey. "It felt very strange at first to submit to authority instead of exercising it—to obey orders instead of giving them; but I like that state of things. I returned to it with the same avidity that a cow, that has long been kept on dry hay, returns to fresh grass. Don't laugh at my simile. It is natural to me to submit." (Many years afterwards Charlotte read in a love-letter of her mother's to her father, "It is pleasant to be subject to those we love.") One can almost feel her happiness as she says: "Some weeks ago, in a high-flown humour, he *forbade* me to use either dictionary or grammar. . . . This makes the task rather arduous, and compels me every now and then to introduce an English word, which nearly plucks the

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eyes out of his head." Oh yes, she was happy at first. "I think I am never unhappy. My present life is so delightful, so congenial to my own nature, compared to that of a governess. My time, constantly occupied, passes too rapidly."

The effect upon Emily of M. Heger's domineering methods was very different. "Emily and he don't draw well together at all," says Charlotte, and we can believe it. Once M. Heger set about teaching them how to acquire a style in writing. He proposed to read them some of the masterpieces of the most admired French authors, such as Archbishop Bossuet and the translators of the Early Church Fathers, that they might listen, analyse, absorb, and thereafter model their own style on these masters. Enthusiastic over his purpose, he asked if they were ready. Emily replied first. She said she could see no good in the plan because if they adopted it they would lose all originality of expression—a reply which, I surmise, plucked the eyes out of his head, so that for a while he and Emily didn't draw well together at all. Emily, he told Mrs. Gaskell when she visited him, had a head for logic and a capability of argument, unusual in a man, and rare indeed in a woman—and we can well imagine that it was rare for M. Heger's women to argue with him. But the force of her gift for logic and reasoning was impaired, he explained with some sadness to Mrs. Gaskell, by a stubborn tenacity of will which rendered her obtuse to all reasoning. So grieved was this little pot at the blackness of the kettle.

How completely Emily, when it suited her, disregarded his advice as to style can be seen in *Wuthering Heights*. It is not at all in the style of Archbishop Bossuet or of the Fathers of the Church. But that he influenced and helped her a great deal we must believe. He was by all accounts a very great teacher, and Emily's poems after her return from Brussels have new qualities of terseness and power. Charlotte declared that Emily was almost as wretched at the Brussels school as she had been at Roe Head, but one suspects that this is only three parts true. She was shy and silent and lonely there, but so she was everywhere, except in the family living-room or on the moors with the family around her. M. Heger admired her brain, and that must have been encouraging and pleasing and have elicited a reciprocal respect.

The girls, according to Mlle de Bassompierre who was a pupil there at the time, preferred her to Charlotte, considering her kinder, more sympathetic, and much cleverer than her sister. (And here we may note that everyone who saw the Brontë sisters together held Emily to be the cleverest: her father; Charlotte herself who "had never seen her parallel in anything"; the Haworth villagers who would say, "A deal o' folk thought her t'clever'st o' them a,' ha' sumiver s^hoo wur so timid, shoo cudn't frame to let it aat"; the girls o' the Brussels academy; and M. Heger, the best judge of all.) She "worked like a horse" in Charlotte's words; and we can be confident that M. Heger helped her willingly with her work, for he was at his happiest with a bright pupil. Charlotte's words quoted above suggested that they often had arguments. He probably "shewed his kind-heartedness by loading her with books" as he did with Charlotte; and in his context let me give you another picture from Miss Frederika Macdonald's report on the Hegers.

Behind the house in the Rue d'Isabelle, as all readers of *Villette* know, there was a garden. And in the garden there were a large *berceau*, above which spread the shade of an acacia, and a smaller, more sequestered bower, under the vines that, running along a high, grey wall, "hung their clusters in loving profusion about the favoured spot, where jasmine and ivy met and married them". This alley, which the pupils must not enter, was called the *Allée défendue*. Who does not remember the *Allée défendue* in *Villette*?

"In my day," says Miss Macdonald, "there was no prohibition of the *Allée défendue*, although the name survived. It was only forbidden to play noisy or disturbing games there; as it was to be reserved for studious pupils, or for the mistresses who wished to read or converse there in quietude.

"If I had a lesson to learn, it was to the *Allée défendue* that I took my book; and in this *allée* I had already discovered and appropriated a sheltered nook, at the furthest end of the *berceau*, where one was nearly hidden oneself in the vine's curtain, but had a delightful view of the garden. Before reaching this low bench, I had noticed, when entering the *berceau* one day, that a ladder stood in the centre; and that, out of view in so far as his head went, a man, in his shirt sleeves, was clipping and thinning the vines. I took it

for granted he was a gardener, and paid no attention to him; but, in a quite happy frame of mind, sat down to learn some poetry by heart. My impression is that it was Lamartine's *Chûte des Feuilles*. Shutting my eyes, whilst repeating the verses out aloud (a trick I had), I opened them, to see M. Heger. He it was who had been thinning the vine; it was a favourite occupation of his (had I read *Villeïte* I should have known it). . . .

"It was a relief to see that he looked amiable, and even friendly; if only I didn't lose my head and say the wrong thing again! . . . But all my anxieties upon this occasion were dispelled by the purpose of my Professor's disturbance of my studies. He invited me to assist him in washing a very stout but very affectionate white dog, to whom I was told I owed this service as he was a compatriot of mine, an English dog, with an English name: a very inappropriate one, for he was sweet-tempered and white, and the name was Pepper. For this operation of washing Pepper, I was invited upstairs into M. Heger's library, which was, in this beautifully clean and orderly house, a model of disorder; clouded as to air, and soaked as to scent, with the smoke of living and the accumulated ashes of dead cigars. But the shelves laden from floor to ceiling with books made a delightful spectacle.

"Upon the occasion of this first visit to his library, M. Heger made me the present of a book that marked a new epoch in my life, because, before I was fifteen, it put before me in a vivid and amusing way the problem of personality. *Le Voyage autour de ma Chamber* of Xavier de Maistre, was my introduction to thoughts and speculations that led me to a later interest in Oriental philosophy, and especially in Buddhism. . . ."

Can one doubt that M. Heger, coming upon Emily in her loneliness, feeling a swell of pity for her in his impressionable heart, and possibly eager for an argument, took her more than once upstairs to his library and gave her this and that book to read, with fervent, incandescent, and, in the end, superheated assurances of their virtue. Miss Isabel Clarke in her *Haworth Parsonage* has suggested that M. Heger introduced her to the work of John Ruysbroeck. This seems to me a brilliant guess; and for more reasons than she assigns to it: was not John Ruysbroeck the most famous of all the Flemish mystics; had he not been a priest in Brussels; was there not, only a few yards from the

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pensionnat, a Rue de Ruysbroeck, where Emily must often have walked; had not von Engelhardt published but a year or two before his *Richard von St. Victor und J. Ruysbroeck*; was not M. Heger a deeply religious and deeply read man, with an interest in mysticism; and, finally, do not many of Emily's subsequent poems speak with the voice, or something of the voice, of Ruysbroeck? Her grandest and profoundest stanza would have won that Master's nod and his quiet "Even so."

Then dawns the Invisible; the Unseen its truth reveals;
My outward sense is gone, my inward essence feels:
Its wings are almost free—its home, its harbour found,
Measuring the gulf, it stoops and dares the final bound.

And :

What I love shall come like visitant of air,
Safe in secret power from lurking human snare. . . .

Burn then, little lamp; glimmer straight and clear,
Hush! a rustling wing stirs methinks the air:
He for whom I wait thus ever comes to me,
Strange Power! I trust thy might; trust thou my constancy.

This is the "knowledge", or the desire, of Ruysbroeck in his *Spiritual Espousals*; as, of course, it is the knowledge, or desire, of St. Francis of Assisi and of St. John of the Cross. *Ecce Sponsus venit; exite obviam ei.* "Behold, the Bridegroom cometh; go ye out to meet him."

§

If Charlotte loved her Master and his methods, and liked Madame Heger for a week or two, she had nothing but scornful and scorching words for the rest of the people in the pensionnat. She could hardly, it appears, look upon the eighty or ninety foreign girls without thinking of the Gadarene swine. A "swinish multitude" and a "wild herd" are two of the phrases she uses in *Villette*. We gather from her letters, and from *Villette*, that she was fascinated by the contemplation of their swinishness. It is likewise

all too clear that her principal reasons for regarding them as sub-human, and proximate to these coarsest and clumsiest of the beasts, were that they suffered from the deformity of not being English, and that their dogmas, worship, and forms of religious intolerance were different from the dogmas, worship, and forms of religious intolerance accepted and taught in the little church at Haworth.

Staring, fascinated, at these French and Belgian girls, she tells us, in *Villette*, that the "continental female" has "eyes full of insolent light and brows hard and unblushing as marble. The continental female is quite a different being to the insular female of the same age and class: I never saw such eyes and brows in England." The fascination of their foreign coarseness is still with her as she writes *Jane Eyre*. "The British peasantry are the best taught, best mannered, most self-respecting of any in Europe: since those days I have seen paysannes and Bäuerinnen; and the best of them seemed to me ignorant, coarse, and besotted, compared with my Morton girls." Their "marsh-phlegm", as she calls it, is a source of continuing, engrossing, distasteful interest. Among the girls "you could not always by outward indications decide which was noble and which plebeian; except that, indeed, the latter had often franker and more courteous manners, while the former bore away the bell for a delicately-balanced combination of insolence and deceit. In the former there was often quick French blood mixed with the marsh-phlegm: I regret to say that the effect of this vivacious fluid chiefly appeared in the oilier glibness with which flattery and fiction ran from the tongue and in a manner lighter and livelier, but quite heartless and insincere." That from *Villette*; in a letter to Branwell we have: "Amongst the 120 persons which compose the daily population of this house I can discern only one or two who deserve anything like regard. This is not owing to foolish fastidiousness on my part, but to the absence of decent qualities on theirs. They have not intellect or politeness or good-nature or good feeling. They are nothing. . . . The phlegm that thickens their blood is too gluey to boil. They are very false in their relations with each other, but they rarely quarrel, and friendship is a folly they are unacquainted with. The black Swan, M. Heger, is the only sole veritable exception to this rule (for Madame, always cool and always

reasoning, is not quite an exception)." On their religion she really lets herself go. "My advice to all Protestants who are tempted to do anything so besotted as turn Catholics is to walk over the sea on to the Continent; to attend mass sedulously for a time; to note well the mummeries thereof; also the idiotic, mercenary aspect of all the priests; and then, if they are still disposed to consider Papistry in any other light than a most feeble, childish piece of humbug, let them turn Papists at once—that's all. I consider Methodism, Quakerism, and the extremes of High and Low Churchism foolish"—in other words only Papa's religion is right—"but Roman Catholicism beats them all." In the *Villette* school "the Church strove to bring up her children robust in body, feeble in soul, fat, ruddy, hale, joyous, ignorant, unthinking." In short, and as she says twice in a single letter: "I cannot count the Belgians anything. . . . I have nobody to speak to for I count the Belgians as nothing."

Comprehensive, conclusive; and dreadfully silly from a woman who prided herself on her strong sense. But Charlotte's intellect, while brilliantly alight and alive within a narrow field, was completely encircled by very high blind walls: English parsonage walls. She seldom dares to look over their coping: still less to leap it and take to the free heather as Emily did. No intellect is of the first order if it can lump together like this whole classes of separate and unique individuals, and paste a label, good or bad, on each lump. The more one reads these overcharged and unintelligent diatribes, the more one feels that, if the swinish herd ran from this haughty and caustic English spirit in their midst, leaving her to wander alone, there was something to be said for them.

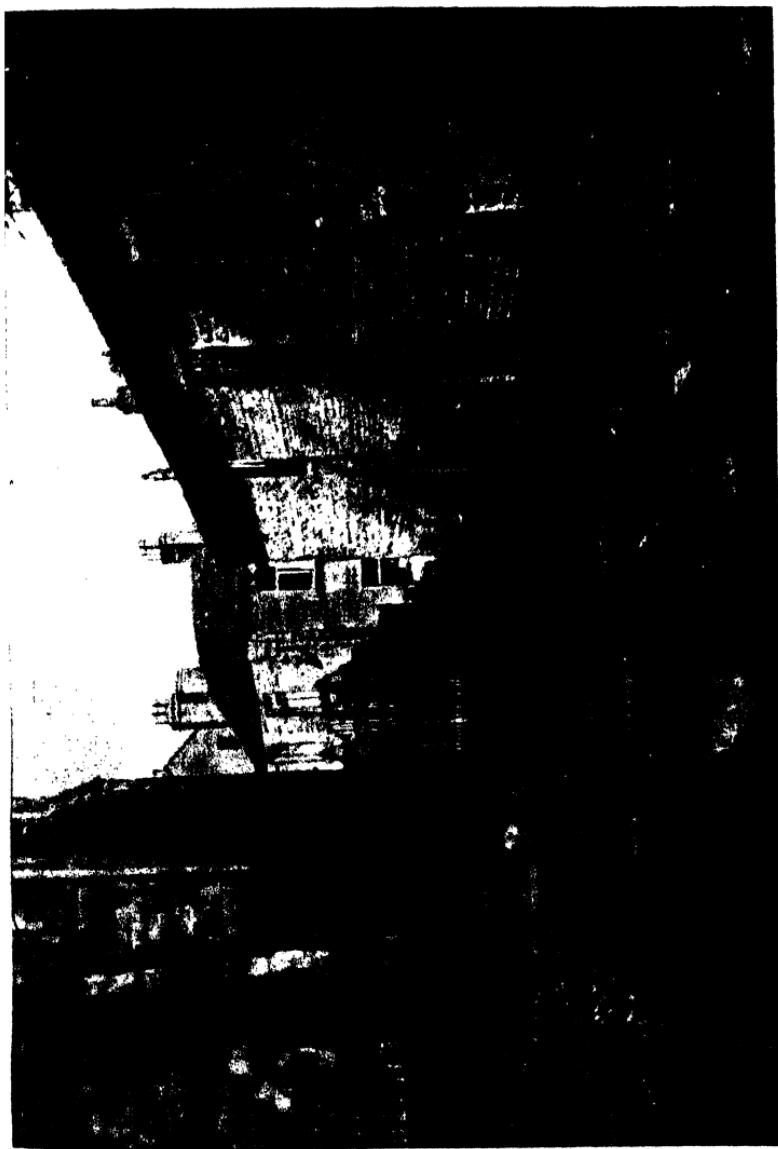
CHAPTER THIRTEEN

AFTER some months Mme Heger proposed to Charlotte and Emily that they should remain with her for another half-year "on mutual terms", Charlotte teaching English and Emily music in return for their board and instruction. At least so Charlotte reported to Ellen; but we may suspect that the proposal came from Charlotte, and that it had been a part of her campaign from the start, since before leaving England, and after Aunt Branwell had consented to finance a six-months' stay abroad, she had written in confidence to Emily, "Before our half-year in Brussels is completed, you and I will have to seek employment abroad. It is not my intention to retrace my steps home till twelve months, if all continues well." The proposal was accepted, either by the two girls or by Mme Heger; and this seems to show that Emily was much less miserable at Brussels than Charlotte used to say; for all agree that, though she was the younger sister, she did not submit easily to Charlotte's rule but rather exercised some tyranny over her.

So everything was in train for them to remain in Brussels when, on the 2nd of November, news came that Aunt Branwell was very ill, and, on the 3rd, that she was dead. She had died of an "internal obstruction". The two girls sailed from Antwerp on the 6th but arrived home too late for the funeral. They learned that their aunt had bequeathed her capital of about £1400 to be divided between Charlotte, Emily, and Anne, and their cousin, Elizabeth Jane Kingston. Thus each girl was now the possessor of something above £300.

What were they to do? One must remain to take Aunt's place as the mistress of the house, and Emily, no doubt consenting willingly, was given this post. Charlotte returned to Brussels; Anne returned to her situation at Thorp Green, as governess in the family of the Rev. and Mrs. Robinson; and Branwell went with her as tutor to the son of that house. It was a year since his disgrace at Luddenden Foot and he seems to have pulled himself together with his father's help, since he was now well-conducted

The Back Windows of the Black Bull, Haworth



**Parsonage Gate,
School and
Church, Haworth**

**The Orchard
Wall among
the Weeds**

enough to be taken as tutor to a clergyman's son, and to hold the situation, as he did, for two and a half years. That the boy had a good heart is shewn in his letter to Francis Grundy after his aunt's death. "I am incoherent, I fear, but I have been waking two nights witnessing such agonizing suffering as I would not wish my worst enemy to endure; and I have now lost the pride and director of all the happy days connected with my childhood."

So they went: Anne and Branwell to Thorp Green, and Charlotte to Brussels: and it is curious to note that Branwell and Charlotte, that January of 1843, each took the road to his and her tragedy; and that it was the same tragedy; though the woman met it with some grandeur and the lad, alas, with none.

Charlotte wrote afterwards of her decision to return to Brussels as a crucial decision, heavy with consequences. "I returned to Brussels after Aunt's death against my conscience, prompted by what then seemed an irresistible impulse. I was punished for my selfish folly by a withdrawal for more than two years of happiness and peace of mind." This is a simple statement of a private but rending conflict between her feeling for what was right and an irrepressible longing. She knew she was in love with her employer's husband, and all her love of righteousness and good sense told her that she ought to keep away from that home. But she was drawn, drawn, to the object of her love, and she persuaded herself that she need not be ashamed of loving him, if she hid her feelings and asked no return. She forced herself to believe that she could worship at a distance and remain good.

These being the thoughts that she carried with her on the Ostend packet, it is a rueful business to recall what she wrote to Ellen, two years before, when, with all the authority of inexperience, she was treating that young lady to a correspondence course on Life and Literature and Love. "No young lady should fall in love till the offer has been made, accepted, the marriage ceremony performed, and the first half-year of wedded life has passed away. A woman may then begin to love, but with great precaution, very coolly, very moderately, very rationally. If she ever loves so much that a harsh word or a cold look cuts her to the

heart, she is a fool." And in another letter: "As to intense passion, I am convinced that it is no desirable feeling. In the first place it seldom or never meets with a requital; and, in the second place, if it did, the feeling would be only temporary; it would last the honeymoon, and then, perhaps, give place to disgust, or indifference, worse, perhaps, than disgust. Certainly this would be the case on the man's part; and on the woman's—God help her if she is left to love passionately and alone."

Brooding always on her unattractiveness, she had convinced herself that no lover, or no lover such as her soul desired, would ever come for her, and therefore she would never love, since she wasn't a fool to love passionately and alone. Who writes in those terms will for a certainty, when the time comes, yield herself to the accursed thing. Charlotte has now done so, and refuses to be ashamed of it. It is a very different voice which cries, "I know what love is as I understand it, and if man or woman should be ashamed of feeling such love then there is nothing right, noble, faithful, truthful, unselfish in this earth"; which is an ill-organised sentence for Charlotte and a *non sequitur*; but how clear!

With this in her breast she went back to Brussels.

§

And Emily remained. It is not difficult to piece together, from Ellen's statements, from Charlotte's posthumous portrait of Emily as Shirley (though here we must allow for some idealisation of the dead), and from Emily's own poems, a mosaic-picture of her life in the parsonage alone. She was happy, because she was always happy when alone. For her occupation she had the kitchen and household tasks which she enjoyed, and used, we may suspect, as a rhythm of discipline for the spirit; she had her piano, which you may see today in the parsonage, an upright, cottage piano like a mahogany bureau, where she played with remarkable facility and power—played *The Visionary*, *The Prisoner*, *Remembrance*, and *Wuthering Heights*; she had her German books to read as she kneaded the dough and her poems to write, in the garden, in the living-room, and on the moors. For her love

she had many things. There was Keeper, her mastiff-bulldog. "After tea Shirley reads, and she is just about as tenacious of her book as she is lax of her needle. Her study is the rug, her seat a footstool or perhaps only the carpet. . . . The tawny and lionlike bulk of Tartar is ever stretched beside her, his negro muzzle laid on his fore paws—straight, strong and shapely as the limbs of an Alpine wolf. One hand of the mistress generally reposes on the loving serf's rude head, because if she takes it away he groans and is discontented." There were the animals in the yard. "Through the open kitchen-door the court is visible, all sunny and gay, and peopled with turkeys and their poult, peahens and their chicks. . . . Irresistible spectacle to Shirley! She runs to the pantry for a roll, and she stands on the doorstep scattering crumbs: around her throng her eager, plump, happy, feathered vassals." There were the moors and the animals on the moors. With Keeper as her only companion she strode on and on into the heather, while the unhurrying clouds swept the cheeks of the moors with shadows, and the larks and kestrels hovered in the clean air, and the hares started and scurried in the grey bent grass. "There were periods when she (Shirley) took delight in perfect vacancy of hand and eye—moments when her thoughts, her simple existence, the fact of the world being around and heaven above her, seemed to yield her such fulness of happiness that she did not need to lift a finger to increase her joy." On these unpeopled heights, with the wind sweeping harp-tones from the grass, Emily's detachment was complete. One is not evil when one is quite alone, and the world of men is swept aside; one is just good, like the animals or the grass. In her tiny bedroom, as she lay beneath the window, there was the night with which she felt so strange an affinity; there were the moon and the stars—and the Mysterious Lover.

The old clock in the gloomy hall
Ticks on, from hour to hour. . . .

And oh, how slow that keen-eyed star
Has tracked the chilly grey!
What, watching yet! how very far
The morning lies away.

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The moon: and this was written but a few weeks after the family went and left her alone:

How clear she shines! How quietly
I lie beneath her guardian light;
While heaven and earth are whispering me,
"Tomorrow, wake, but dream tonight. . . ."

And this shall be my dream tonight;
I'll think the heaven of glorious spheres
Is rolling on its course of light
In endless bliss through endless years;
I'll think, there's not one world above,
Far as these straining eyes can see,
Where Wisdom ever laughed at Love,
Or Virtue crouched to Infamy;

Where, writhing 'neath the strokes of Fate,
The mangled wretch was forced to smile;
To match his patience 'gainst her hate,
His heart rebellious all the while.
Where pleasure still will lead to wrong,
And helpless Reason warn in vain;
And Truth is weak, and Treachery strong;
And Joy the surest path to pain;
And Peace, the lethargy of Grief;
And Hope, a phantom of the soul;
And Life, a labour, void and brief;
And Death, the despot of the whole!

The stars:

Thought followed thought, star followed star
Through boundless regions, on;
While one sweet influence, near and far,
Thrilled through, and proved us one

Why did the morning dawn to break
So great, so pure, a spell
And scorch with fire the tranquil cheek,
Where your cool radiance fell? . . .

IN THE STEPS OF THE BRONTËS

I turned me to the pillow, then,
To call back night and see
Your worlds of solemn light, again,
Throb with my heart and me.

The Lover :

Silent is the House—all are laid asleep;
One, alone, looks out o'er the snowwreaths deep,
Watching every cloud, dreading every breeze
That whirls the wildering drifts, and bends the groaning trees.

Frown, my haughty sire, chide, my angry dame,
Set your slaves to spy, threaten me with shame:
But neither sire nor dame, nor prying serf shall know
What angel nightly tracks that waste of winter snow.

What I love shall come like visitant of air,
Safe in secret power from lurking human snare;
What loves me, no word of mine shall e'er betray,
Though for faith unstained my life must forfeit pay.

Burn, then, little lamp; glimmer straight and clear—
Hush! a rustling wing stirs, methinks, the air:
He for whom I wait, thus ever comes to me;
Strange Power! I trust thy might; trust thou my constancy.

The Lover speaks :

I'll come when thou art saddest,
Bring light in the darkened room,
When the rude days' mirth has vanished,
And the smile of joy is banished
From evening's chilly gloom. . . .

Listen! 'tis just the hour,
The awful time for thee:
Dost thou not feel upon the soul
A flood of strange sensations roll,
Forerunner of a sterner power,
Heralds of me?

IN THE STEPS OF THE BRONTËS

Emily speaks :

So stood I, in Heaven's glorious sun,
And in the glare of Hell;
My spirit drank a mingled tone
Of seraph's song and demon's moan;
What my soul bore, my soul alone
Within itself may tell.

Speak, God of visions, plead for me,
And tell why I have chosen thee.

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

AND in the meantime what was happening to Charlotte in Brussels? What hidden tragedy was being enacted there? How fared Charlotte's love for her Master, M. Heger, while Emily was calling to her lover, the Invisible? The story in full detail can never be told. For our witness to the great pain that was to break Charlotte, and make her, we have only her letters written from Brussels in this year of 1843, and her love-letters written to M. Heger in the two subsequent years, but not released for publication by the Heger family till seventy years after, in 1913, when they shook the whole world of Brontë students and lovers because they proved at last, and beyond all reasonable questioning, what many had suspected and many had refused to believe—that there was much flaming autobiography in the pages of *Villette* and the story of Lucy Snowe. I think Emily heard the story after Charlotte came home, for Charlotte's heart must have ached for a confidante, and her letters to Ellen and to Emily, before her return, suggest that she is longing to speak more fully. She knew too that if she told Emily, that silent sister would keep her secrets as incorruptibly as she kept her own.

Certain facts we can now accept as established. Told simply they are these. Charlotte returned to the long house in the Rue d'Isabelle and, in her own words to Ellen, Mme Heger received her with great kindness. "As I told you before, M. and Madame Heger are the only two persons in the house for whom I really experience regard and esteem, and, of course, I cannot be always with them, nor even very often. They told me when I first returned, that I was to consider their sitting-room my sitting-room also, and to go there whenever I was not engaged in the schoolroom." She taught English to M. Heger and his brother-in-law, with hilarious results; as it is easy to imagine, M. Heger being the pupil. She was fairly happy for the first few months, but some new strange notes sound in an April letter to Ellen. "There are certain disadvantages in my present position, what position on earth is without them? . . . There was an observation in your last letter which excited, for a moment, my

wrath. At first I thought it would be folly to reply to it, and I would let it die. Afterwards I determined to give one answer, once for all. 'Three or four people,' it seems, 'have the idea that the future *époux* of Mademoiselle Brontë is on the Continent.' These people are wiser than I am. They could not believe that I crossed the sea merely to return as teacher to Madame Heger's. I must have some more powerful motive than respect for my master and mistress, gratitude for their kindness, etc. . . . If these charitable people knew the total seclusion of the life I lead—that I never exchange a word with any other man than Monsieur Heger, and seldom indeed with him—they would, perhaps, cease to suppose that any such chimerical and groundless notion had influenced my proceedings. . . . It is an imbecility, which I reject with contempt, for women who have neither fortune nor beauty to make marriage the principal object of their wishes and hopes, and the aim of all their actions; not to be able to convince themselves that they are unattractive, and that they had better be quiet, and think of other things than wedlock."

"Seldom indeed with him . . . neither fortune nor beauty. . . ." Something has happened to wither her first content. The sun of M. Heger's face has gone behind a cloud. The new bitterness flavours a letter sent to Branwell at Thorp Green, a few days after. "As for me, I am very well and wag on as usual. I perceive, however, that I grow exceedingly misanthropic and sour"—and here follows the acetose description quoted earlier, of the hundred and twenty persons in the house, who are without decent qualities and whose marsh-phlegm is too gluey to boil, M. Heger being the only exception. "But I rarely speak to Monsieur now, for, not being a pupil, I have little or nothing to do with him. From time to time he shows his kindheartedness by loading me with books, so that I am still indebted to him for all the amusement I have. Except for the total want of companionship I have nothing to complain of. . . . It is a curious metaphysical fact that always in the evening when I am in the great dormitory alone, having no other company than a number of beds with white curtains, I always recur as fanatically as ever to the old ideas, the old faces, and the old scenes in the world below. Give my love to Anne—And, believe me, yourn—

"Dear Anne—write to me—Your affectionate Schwester, C. B.

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"Mr. Heger has just been in and given me a little German Testament as a present. I was surprised, for since a good many days, he has hardly spoken to me."

This is followed by a mysterious letter to Emily. "I am richly off for companionship in these parts. Of late days, M. and Mde. Heger rarely speak to me, and I really don't pretend to care a fig for anybody else in the establishment. You are not to suppose by that expression that I am under the influence of *warm* affection for Mde. Heger. I am convinced she does not like me—why, I can't tell, nor do I think she herself has any definite reason for the aversion. . . . M. Heger is wondrously influenced by Madame, and I should not wonder if he disapproves very much of my unamiable want of sociability. He has already given me a brief lecture on universal *bienveillance*, and, perceiving that I don't improve in consequence, I fancy he has taken to considering me as a person to be let alone—left to the error of her ways; and consequently he has in a great measure withdrawn the light of his countenance, and I get on from day to day in a Robinson-Crusoe-like condition—very lonely. That does not signify. In other respects I have nothing substantial to complain of, nor is even this a cause for complaint. Except the loss of M. Heger's goodwill (if I have lost it) I care for none of 'em. I hope you are well and hearty. Walk out often on the moors."

The *grandes vacances* began in the middle of August and lasted till October. The pupils scattered to their several homes; the Hegers with their children went for a holiday of some weeks; and Charlotte was left alone in the pensionnat with the French governess whom she sombrely and stubbornly hated. "It is the first time in my life that I have really dreaded the vacation. Alas! I can hardly write, I have such a dreary weight at my heart; and I do so wish to go home." Why did she not go home, having three hundred pounds of her aunt's money in hand? Was it that she could not draw herself away from the places associated with M. Heger; did she fear lest, once gone, she might not get back again to him; was she held, fascinated by her pain like a bird by the stare of a snake? We know that she wandered along the streets, which the August sun was heating beneath her feet, and extending before her gaze; through the alien and unheeding crowds, past the cafés and restaurants with their smells

of cigar-smoke and food, under the boulevard trees whose leaves were already seer with the pinch of autumn like her heart; and that all the time her thoughts harried and spent her. "I go out and traverse the boulevards and streets of Bruxelles sometimes for hours together. Yesterday I went on a pilgrimage to the cemetery, and far beyond it on to a hill where there was nothing but fields as far as the horizon. When I came back it was evening."

There are parts of *Shirley* where Caroline Helstone's thoughts are almost certainly Charlotte's in these August days. "Different indeed is Robert's mental condition to mine. I think only of him; he has no room, no leisure, to think of me. The feeling called love is and has been for two years the predominant emotion of my heart—always there, always awake, always astir. Quite other feelings absorb his reflections and govern his faculties.

... I have to live, perhaps, till seventy years. As far as I know, I have good health; half a century of existence may lie before me. How am I to occupy it? What am I to do to fill the interval of time which spreads between me and the grave? ... I shall never marry. What was I created for, I wonder. Where is my place in the world? Ah, I see that is the question which most old maids are puzzled to solve. Other people solve it for them by saying: 'Your place is to do good to others, to be helpful whenever help is wanted.' ... Is this enough? Is it to live?"

Her emotion and desire were at war with her religion and morality; and she carried this battlefield in her breast as she threaded the endless streets. We know what happened at last. She told it to Emily, because she had to tell someone.

"When I came back it was evening; but I had such a repugnance to return to the house, which contained nothing that I cared for, I still kept threading the streets in the neighbourhood of the Rue d'Isabelle and avoiding it. I found myself opposite to Ste. Gudule, and the bell, whose voice you know, began to toll for evening salut. I went in, quite alone (which procedure you will say is not much like me), wandered about the aisles where a few old women were saying their prayers, till vespers begun. I stayed till they were over. Still I could not leave the church or force myself to go home—to school I mean. An odd whim came into my head. In a solitary part of the Cathedral six or seven

people still remained kneeling by the confessional. In two confessionals I saw a priest. I felt as if I did not care what I did, provided it was not absolutely wrong, and that it served to vary my life and yield a moment's interest. I took a fancy to change myself into a Catholic and go and make a real confession to see what it was like. Knowing me as you do, you will think this odd, but when people are by themselves they have singular fancies. A penitent was occupied in confessing. They do not go into the sort of pew or cloister which the priest occupies, but kneel down on the steps and confess through a grating. Both the confessor and the penitent whisper very low, you can hardly hear their voices. After I had watched two or three penitents go and return I approached at last and knelt down in a niche which was just vacated. I had to kneel there ten minutes waiting, for on the other side was another penitent invisible to me. At last that one went away and a little wooden door inside the grating opened, and I saw the priest leaning his ear towards me. I was obliged to begin, and yet I did not know a word of the formula with which they always commence their confessions. It was a funny position. I felt precisely as I did when alone on the Thames at midnight. I commenced with saying I was a foreigner and had been brought up a Protestant. The priest asked if I was a Protestant then. I somehow could not tell a lie and said 'yes'. He replied that in that case I could not '*jouir du bonheur de la confesse*'; but I was determined to confess, and at last he said he would allow me because it might be the first step towards returning to the true church. I actually did confess—a real confession. When I had done he told me his address, and said that every morning I was to go to the rue du Parc—to his house—and he would reason with me and try to convince me of the error and enormity of being a Protestant!!! I promised faithfully to go. Of course, however, the adventure stops there, and I hope I shall never see the priest again. I think you had better not tell Papa of this. He will not understand that it was only a freak, and will perhaps think I am going to turn Catholic. Trusting that you and Papa are well, and also Tabby and the Holyles, and hoping you will write to me immediately—I am, yours, C. B."

"An odd whim"? "A freak"? We know it was more than that; she has shewn us in *Villette*, where this old but ever-present

memory is worked up into the book's most unforgettable scene, that it was much more than that. And why is she driven to state, in a would-be hearty and self-ridiculing letter, that it was a "real confession"? Her present frustration and conflict, climax of all her frustrations, had stretched her to a bursting-strain; it must find a release; it must win some healing from an issue in words and a story, and from the balm of another's interest. Her first confession was made in this "niche" among the shadows of Ste. Gudule; the next in *The Professor*, *Jane Eyre*, *Shirley*, and *Villette*. And the priest never knew who it was on the other side of the grille! Her first audience was an unknown and half-seen figure in the robes of a priest; the next was the world.

"A real confession." So at the foot of that old Mother, the Church whom she loved to revile, Charlotte threw herself down on this autumn evening; twenty-two years almost to a day, since her own mother had gone through the Gate of the Dead and left her alone.

§

The Pensionnat which Mme. Heger governed with such calm dignity, the Athénée Royal where M. Heger taught with such fervour and fury, the Rue d'Isabelle and the neighbouring streets where Emily wandered with her secret self-possession and Charlotte with her dumb love—all these, or nearly all, are gone now. They stood till about the year 1909, and then their demolition was begun so that some great new schemes might be put in hand. These schemes included the joining of the Gare du Midi to the Gare du Nord by a new railway running through the centre of Brussels; the building of a new Gare Centrale; the laying out of wide roadways in the place of the old stairways and narrow, inclined streets; and the erection of a Palais des Beaux-Arts and huge modern blocks of offices, banks, and shops.

But some magnificent and unwearying help given me by M. Eugène Rocart and M. Léon Navez of the Bibliothèque Royale, who spent a morning turning the library upside down that my readers might at no point be led astray, and by M. Pergameni, the archivist of the City of Brussels, who was equally rough with the ancient Hôtel de Ville, enable me with a clear conscience to

point for you a way into the past as follows: if you would get as near as possible to the Rue d'Isabelle and the heart of Charlotte which broke there, you must go to the southern end of that new sweeping roadway, the Rue Ravenstein, descend a stairway, and find yourself in a tiny, narrow, and truncated stretch of the old Rue Teraerken, with the basements of the new Palais des Beaux-Arts on one side of you and the walls of the ancient Hôtel Ravenstein on the other. Down there in the silence you are as near to the Rue d'Isabelle as you will ever get, and your feet are on the cobbles which Charlotte and Emily trod when it was Sunday in Brussels, and the bells were ringing, and they were coming out of the low-lying Rue d'Isabelle into the Rue Teraerken on their way to the Protestant Chapel in the Rue du Musée. The Palais des Beaux-Arts stands on, or perhaps we should say high above, the garden of the pensionnat. It stands where once stood the *Allée défendue* and the large berceau under the acacia's shade, and the avenue of pear trees, and where M. Heger (M. Paul Emmanuel) would potter with his tools and his little dog, trimming the beds or thinning the vines.

“. . . That old garden had its charms”—do you remember Lucy Snowe in *Villette*? “On summer mornings I used to rise early to enjoy them alone; on summer evenings, to linger solitary, to keep tryst with the rising moon, or taste one kiss of the evening breeze, or fancy rather than feel the freshness of dew descending. The turf was verdant, the gravelled walks were white; sun-bright nasturtiums clustered beautiful about the roots of the doddered orchard giants. . . . At sunset, or the hour of salut, when the externes were gone home, and the boarders quiet at their studies; pleasant was it then to stray down the peaceful alleys, and hear the bells of St. Jean Baptiste peal out with their sweet, soft, exalted sound.”

Turn about from this still and haunted corner and pass under the arch that now carries the Rue Ravenstein above you, and you will find a vast garage under the other arches of that new white viaduct. These are the sepulchre of the old Athénée Royal, whose buildings, as all readers of *Villette* will remember, ran side by side with the garden of the pensionnat. Wander further among the destruction and reconstruction—for the works are still in progress forty years after their commencement—and you

will find a small fragment of Charlotte's Brussels: a brief and blinded section of the Rue des Douze Apôtres with the ancient chapel of St. Salazar at its corner. Return to the wide and high-flying Rue Ravenstein and walk up the Rue de la Bibliothèque towards the stairway that leads to the Parc de Bruxelles, and you are walking over the classrooms and the carré and the private apartments of M. and Mme Heger. The enormous building of the Banque de la Société Générale de Belgique crushes beneath its feet the grande salle and the refectory, scenes of so many episodes in *Villette*.

That is all there is now. Leave it so.

§

School began again in late September or early October, and almost at once Charlotte went to Mme Heger and gave her notice. Was this the counsel of the nameless priest? What else could he have said to her? Mme Heger was ready to accept her notice, but M. Heger, having heard of it, sent for Charlotte immediately and pronounced with vehemence his decision that she should not leave; and she promised to stay a little while longer.

All these are the actual words of one of her letters; but can we not read in them that her heart was stronger than her conscience and seized upon M. Heger's encouragement as a suspension of her sentence? In another letter she records that Madame Heger, "good and kind as I have described her", never came near her in the holiday hours when the great schoolrooms were empty and silent. "I own I was astonished the first time I was left alone thus; when everybody else was enjoying the pleasures of a fête day with their friends and she knew I was quite by myself, and never took the least notice of me. Yet I understand she praises me to everybody, and says what excellent lessons I give. . . . You remember the letter she wrote to me when I was in England? How kind and affectionate that was? Is it not odd?"

No, not odd. The two calm deities of Madame's worship—so said Lucy Snowe of Madame Beck and so say many old pupils

of Madame Heger, were la Convenance and la Décence; and to have a junior mistress palpably sick with love for the husband of the directress was neither "convenable" nor "décent" in a Pensionnat de Jeunes Filles. How Charlotte, with her incisive perceptions and steely common sense, could have believed that she was hiding her passionate and irritable love from the eye of Madame which, on her own showing, was as searching as a microscope and missed nothing of the slightest importance—this is something that makes us wonder at her bewildered and half-blinded state.

There is no tincture of evidence that Madame doubted for a moment the fidelity of her husband, though Charlotte, befogged by subconscious hate, seemed always to hold that her employer had spied upon and spurned her like a jealous woman. Nor is there the slightest evidence that M. Heger ever felt for the plain little English governess anything more than the "affection presque paternelle" to which he, though only seven years older than Charlotte, confessed in the graceful letter of condolence that he sent to Mr. Brontë when Aunt Branwell died. There is, on the other hand, much evidence that Madame saw and understood everything and that she and her husband behaved, in a difficult and distressing situation, with tact, forbearance, and sympathy.

I have no heart in this heavy matter but to give you some of Charlotte's own words, and leave them to your pity. In their strangled inability to be explicit, in their helpless understatement, they are more moving than the packed and brimming pages of *Villette*. "I have much to say—many odd little things, queer and puzzling enough—but which one day perhaps or rather one evening—if ever we should find ourselves by the fireside at Haworth or Brookroyd"—Ellen's new home—"with our feet on the fender, curling our hair—I may communicate to you." And to Emily: "This is Sunday morning. They are at their idolatrous 'messe', and I am here, that is in the Réfectoire. I should like uncommonly to be in the dining-room at home, or in the kitchen, or in the back kitchen. I should like even to be cutting up the hash, with the clerk and some register people at the other table, and you standing by, watching that I put enough flour, not too much pepper and, above all, that I save the best pieces of the leg

of mutton for Tiger and Keeper, the first of which personages would be jumping about the dish and carving-knife and the latter standing like a devouring flame on the kitchen floor"—how Charlotte could write when the fire was in her heart! "To complete the picture, Tabby blowing the fire, in order to boil the potatoes to a sort of vegetable glue! How divine are these recollections to me at this moment! . . . Write to me again soon. Tell me whether Papa really wants me very much to come home, and whether you do likewise. I have an idea that I should be of no use there—a sort of aged person upon the parish. I pray with all my heart and soul that all may continue well at Haworth; above all in our grey, half-inhabited house. God bless the walls thereof! Safety, health, happiness, and prosperity to you, Papa, and Tabby. Amen. C. B."

One day she stood alone in a great crowd, up on the Rue Royale just above the Rue d'Isabelle, and saw Queen Victoria go flashing by in her carriage-and-six, surrounded by soldiers. "She was laughing and talking very gaily," Charlotte tells Emily; "a little, stout, vivacious lady, very plainly dressed, not much dignity or pretension about her." So there they were, two very small young women, much of an age, Victoria twenty-four and Charlotte twenty-seven; one the focal figure in a brilliant aura of publicity, the other an atom in the crowd; the one delighting, as twenty-four can, in her popularity and grandeur; the other hopeless and haggard in the very pit of a catastrophe.

At last she could bear it no more. She went. She went back to her home. Either she ran from the intolerable pain or, like Jane Eyre when she knew she must leave her Master because he was married, she called up all her moral force, overwhelmed and crashed down her temptation, and went bravely. Let us believe the latter, and praise it. That it cost her all she possessed to pay, all that Jane Eyre is shewn to have suffered in some of the grandest chapters of her story, is evident enough from the simple sentences she wrote a few weeks after it was all over. "I suffered much before I left Brussels. I think, however long I live, I shall not forget what the parting with M. Heger cost me; it grieved me so much to grieve him who has been so true, kind, and disinterested a friend." It is known that Mme Heger helped her gently towards the inevitable step, intimating that she would not

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really need her after the year ended and suggesting that she might send one of her own daughters to her as a pupil if she managed to set up a school in England. And M. Heger, to help her with her school, gave her a diploma, sealed with the seal of the Athénée Royal de Bruxelles, certifying that she was fully acquainted with the French language and trained to teach it. She told Emily that the final decision was her own. "Dear E. J., I have taken my determination. I hope to be at home the day after New Year's Day. I have told Mme Heger. . . . Low spirits have affected me much lately, but I hope all will be well when I get home—above all, if I find Papa and you and B. and A. well. I am not ill in body. It is only the mind which is a trifle shaken—or want of comfort."

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

THERE is a fitness in the fact that it was in the last days of the year 1843 that Charlotte said good-bye to M. Heger and to Brussels, and the first days of the new year when she arrived in Haworth. The central experience of her life had ended, and now the years began in which it would lie below ground and germinate before breaking the earth and flowering. "Souffrir passe; avoir souffert ne passe jamais." A little while ago we saw her coming down, somewhat sadly, from Parnassus, after a kindly rebuff from Robert Southey; now she is coming down from another hill. She is going straight to her home like an animal which has been hurt. She comes up the lane by the church and enters by the garden gate. It is still the Christmas holidays, and Emily, Anne and Branwell are all in the house to welcome her back. I make no doubt that she provided a smile for them all.

All who have suffered even a little of what she is suffering now will be able to imagine the next days. She is rather quiet in the house and probably very gentle with everyone. When the time comes for a walk she prefers to walk alone. She walks far into the heather and cotton grass behind her home, and the great heaving moors, under the pale sky of winter, go on and on for ever, with love over no horizon. Of course she turns towards the east sometimes where Brussels is. "It seldom or never meets with a requital. . . . On the woman's part—God help her if she is left to love passionately and alone."

Beneath the windows of her home was the church: that old lost church which dwells like a ghost within the present large, pretentious, unmeaning pile; that honest old barn with its wooden galleries, leaded windows, cross-beamed roof, and tall oak pews; that homely house so different in its stolid angularity from the soaring and dusky aisles of Ste. Gudule. There on her knees she gave all the love, which for her was the most important thing in the world, and which had been returned to her unwanted, to the one Master, the one Professor, Who would take it, and master her, and allot her His tasks for the future.

I want you to look at his passage from *Shirley*, written four

years later; if ever we can be sure that Charlotte, as she wrote, was remembering these days, we can be sure of it here.

"Bent on victory over a mortal pain, she did her best to quell it. Never had she been seen so busy, so studious, and, above all, so active. She took walks in all weathers, long walks in solitary directions. Day by day she came back in the evening, pale and wearied-looking, yet seemingly not fatigued; for still, as soon as she had thrown off her bonnet and shawl, she would, instead of resting, begin to pace her apartment. Sometimes she would not sit down till she was literally faint. She said she did this to tire herself well, that she might sleep soundly at night. But if that was her aim it was unattained; for at night, when others slumbered, she was tossing on her pillow, or sitting at the foot of her couch in the darkness, forgetful, apparently, of the necessity of seeking repose. Often, unhappy girl! she was crying—crying in a sort of intolerable despair, which, when it rushed over her, smote down her strength, and reduced her to childlike helplessness.

"When thus prostrate, temptations besieged her. Weak suggestions whispered in her weary heart to write to Robert, and say that she was unhappy because she was forbidden to see him and Hortense, and that she feared he would withdraw his friendship (not love) from her, and forget her entirely, and begging him to remember her, and sometimes to write to her. One or two such letters she actually indited, but she never sent them; shame and good sense forbade."

Charlotte *did* write to M. Heger. She *had* to. She worried and fretted him with letters. In the first years of her loneliness and misery neither shame nor good sense could forbid her cries to him: the shame, spoken of in this passage, must have come afterwards. Four of her letters survive; and their story is of an interest as profound as it is moving. For seventy years no one except the Hegers and one or two other people knew of their existence; and then, in 1913, the children of M. and Mme Heger, after a family council, presented them to the British Museum. "Sir," wrote Dr. Paul Heger, the youngest of the children, but then a man nearing seventy, to the Librarian of the Museum, "In the name of my sisters and myself, as the representatives of the late M. Constantin Heger, I beg leave to offer to the British Museum, as the official custodian on behalf of the British People, the

letters of Charlotte Brontë which the great novelist addressed to our father."

Mme Heger, as you will learn, had kept them from the public eye for fifty years, even after Charlotte, in *Villette*, had made of her a burnt offering to the vindictiveness in her heart. Mrs. Gaskell saw them, when she visited M. Heger in search of facts for her biography, but she, as discreet about her heroine, Charlotte, as she was unsparing with others, hid the disturbing truth which she read in them and quoted only those passages that were safe. In effect, she lied by omission. Perhaps she could do nothing else, for Charlotte's father and husband, at whose request she was writing, were still alive; but in sparing the Brontës she spoiled her book for ever. She left out the central event of Charlotte's life. Her book is an assemblage of valuable masonry, but if the keystone is refused the arch cannot be built.

Here, gathered in the main from Mr. Marion Spielmann's *Inner History of the Brontë-Heger Letters*, but from some other sources too, is the story. Soon after Charlotte's departure from the pensionnat her letters to M. Heger began to arrive. M. Heger read them, and after his usual habit with letters, tore them across, and put them in his wastepaper-basket. He did not show them to his wife but told her about them and asked her to write in her own hand his replies. Of Mme Heger's *surveillance*, so maliciously etched in *Villette*, we have heard from many quarters; and it was exactly in keeping with this that she went to the wastepaper-basket, retrieved the torn scraps, pieced them together again, and put them for safe custody in her jewel box. The letters continued to arrive at long intervals, and they "betrayed a growing attachment which my parents thought it kind and wise to check". So Dr. Paul Heger told Mrs. Ellis Chadwick when, thirty-odd years ago, she preceded me *In the Footsteps of the Brontës*. Charlotte was told, according to Mrs. Chadwick, that her letters gave evidence of too much excitement and exaltation, and she was advised to tone them down and write merely of her health and occupations, and of those of her home circle.

This, I fancy, so wounded the sick heart of Charlotte that it stopped the letters at once: anyhow, two years after her flight from Brussels the letters ceased. Two more years, and Charlotte was famous; ten more years, and she was dead, and Mrs. Gaskell

was about to write her *Life*. This *Life* appeared in 1857; Ellen Nussey was dissatisfied with it as an untrue and over-sombre picture of her friend, and played with the notion of writing her own book on Charlotte. In 1863 she wrote to M. Heger for his advice and help. Should she publish her own selection and interpretation of the hundreds of Charlotte's letters in her possession; and would he translate them into French? In the course of a long letter, really beautiful in its courtesy and tenderness, which I cannot quote in full but you may read in Mrs. Chadwick's book, he wrote these words: "Je me suis donc posé cette question: pourrais-je, sans l'assentiment de mon ami, publier ses lettres intimes, c'est à dire les confidences qu'il m'a faites? Ne m'a-t-il pas laissé voir, de lui-même, plus qu'il ne voulait montrer à autrui? ce qu'on m'aurait dit à voix basse pourrais-je le redire à haute voix après le départ de l'imprudent ami qui s'est confié à ma discréption? ces impression fugitives, ces appréciations irréfléchies, jetées, à cœur ouvert dans une causerie intime, puis-je les livrer en pâture à la curiosité maligne des lecteurs? . . . Votre pieuse affection veut, par la publication de la correspondance de Charlotte, ajouter à la gloire, à la considération de votre amie; je le comprends; mais permettez-moi de vous mettre en garde contre vous même; en triant sa correspondance, supposez toujours votre amie présente à côté de vous, et consultez-la."

Here we have a sufficient explanation of the silence of the Hegers and their dignity, beneath great provocation and wounding. And they *were* wounded: M. Heger would never speak of *Villette* except to say that it was *bien vilain* of Charlotte to have written it; and he would add wryly but not without some generosity, "mais, c'est le meilleur vin qui fait le vinaigre le plus acide".

Somewhere about this time, that is to say more than twenty years after Charlotte's sojourn in Brussels, Louise Heger, the second daughter, went to hear a lecture on Charlotte Brontë, whom she remembered as "a little person, extremely narrow of chest, with side-curls, large eyes and sadly defective teeth—somewhat ill-favoured indeed, and unattractive to look upon—and yet beloved by me". To her horror she heard her parents held up to obloquy for their treatment of Charlotte; and she hurried home and told

her mother all about it. And Mme Heger, in her calm, quiet way, took her up to her room, opened the jewel box, and gave her the letters to read. And still, despite the obloquy, Mme Heger, that silent lady, held her peace. Louise Heger told Frederika Macdonald, once a pupil at the pensionnat and now her very dear friend, that, while the letters would be preserved, they would not be published until everyone had disappeared who could in any way be offended by their disclosure.

In 1890 Mme Heger died, aged eighty years, and the jewel box with the letters in it became the property of Louise. In 1896 M. Heger died, then in his eighty-seventh year, and the children took counsel together as to whether it was time for the letters to be published; and they decided that the time was not yet. It was in 1913 that Dr. Paul Heger brought the letters to London and after a consultation with Mr. Marion Spielmann, who had been an active officer of certain art exhibitions in Bruges and Brussels, consented to their publication. They were presented to the British Museum and published in *The Times*; and great was the sensation following.

The Times and Mr. Spielmann kindly permit my use of them. Hear then a little of their love and suffering.

"Ah, Monsieur! I once wrote you a letter that was less than reasonable, because sorrow was at my heart; but I shall do so no more. I shall try to be selfish no longer: and even while I look upon your letters as one of the greatest felicities known to me I shall await the receipt of them in patience until it pleases you and suits you to send me any. Meanwhile I may well send you a little letter from time to time—you have authorized me to do so. I greatly fear that I shall forget French, for I am firmly convinced that I shall see you again some day—I know not how or when—but it must be, for I wish it so much, and then I should not wish to remain dumb before you—it would be too sad to see you and not be able to speak to you. To avoid such a misfortune I learn every day by heart a half page of French from a book written in familiar style: and I take pleasure in learning this lesson, Monsieur; as I pronounce the French words it seems to me as if I were chatting with you. . . ."

"I have not begged you to write to me soon as I fear to importune you—but you are too kind to forget that I wish it

all the same—yes, I wish it greatly. Enough; after all, do as you wish, Monsieur. If, then, I received a letter and if I thought you had written it *out of pity*—I should feel deeply wounded. It seems that Mrs. Wheelwright is going to Paris before going to Brussels—but she will post my letter at Boulogne. Once more good-bye, Monsieur; it hurts to say good-bye even in a letter. Oh, it is certain that I shall see you again one day—it must be so—for as soon as I shall have earned enough money to go to Brussels I shall go there—and I shall see you again if only for a moment. . . .”

“I am not going to write a long letter; in the first place I have not the time—it must leave at once; and then, I am afraid of worrying you. I would only ask of you if you heard from me at the beginning of May and again in the month of August? For six months I have been awaiting a letter from Monsieur—six months’ waiting is very long, you know! . . .”

“I have just had bound all the books you gave me when I was at Brussels. I take delight in contemplating them; they make quite a little library. To begin with, there are the complete works of Bernardin de St. Pierre—the *Pensées de Pascal*—a book of poetry, two German books—and (worth all the rest) two discourses of Monsieur le Professeur Heger delivered at the distribution of prizes of the Athénée Royal. . . .”

“Mr. Taylor has returned. I asked him if he had a letter for me. ‘No; nothing.’ ‘Patience,’ said I—‘his sister will be here soon.’ Miss Taylor has returned. ‘I have nothing for you from Monsieur Heger,’ says she; ‘neither letter nor message.’ Having realised the meaning of these words, I said to myself what I should say to another similarly placed: ‘You must be resigned, and above all do not grieve at a misfortune which you have not deserved.’ I strove to restrain my tears, to utter no complaint. But when one does not complain, when one seeks to dominate oneself with a tyrant’s grip, the faculties start into rebellion and one pays for external calm with an internal struggle that is almost unbearable. Day and night I find neither rest nor peace. If I sleep I am disturbed by tormenting dreams in which I see you, always severe, always grave, always incensed against me. Forgive me then, Monsieur, if I adopt the course of writing to you again. How can I endure life if I make no effort to ease

its sufferings? I know that you will be irritated when you read this letter. You will say once more that I am hysterical (or neurotic)—that I have black thoughts, etc. So be it, Monsieur; I do not seek to justify myself; I submit to every sort of reproach. All I know is, that I cannot, that I will not, resign myself to lose wholly the friendship of my master. I would rather suffer the greatest physical pain than always have my heart lacerated by smarting regrets. If my master withdraws his friendship from me entirely I shall be altogether without hope; if he gives me a little—just a little—I shall be satisfied—happy; I shall have a reason for living on, for working. Monsieur, the poor have not need of much to sustain them—they ask only for the crumbs that fall from the rich men's table. But if they are refused the crumbs they die of hunger. Nor do I, either, need much affection from those I love. I should not know what to do with a friendship entire and complete—I am not used to it. But you showed me of yore a *little* interest, when I was your pupil in Brussels, and I hold on to the maintenance of that *little* interest—I hold on to it as I would hold on to life. . . .”

“I tell you frankly that I have tried meanwhile to forget you, for the remembrance of a person whom one thinks never to see again and whom, nevertheless, one greatly esteems, frets too much the mind; and when one has suffered that kind of anxiety for a year or two, one is ready to do anything to find peace once more. I have done everything; I have sought occupations; I have denied myself absolutely the pleasure of speaking about you—even to Emily; but I have been able to conquer neither my regrets nor my impatience. That, indeed, is humiliating—to be unable to control one's own thoughts, to be the slave of a regret, of a memory, the slave of a fixed and dominant idea which lords it over the mind. . . . To write to an old pupil cannot be a very interesting occupation for you, I know; but for me it is life. Your last letter was stay and prop to me—nourishment to me for half a year. Now I need another and you will give it me; not because you bear me friendship—you cannot have much—but because you are compassionate of soul and you would condemn no one to prolonged suffering to save yourself a few moments' trouble. To forbid me to write to you, to refuse to answer me, would be to tear from me my only joy on earth,

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to deprive me of my last privilege—a privilege I never shall consent willingly to surrender. Believe me, *mon maître*, in writing to me it is a good deed that you will do. So long as I believe you are pleased with me, so long as I have hope of receiving news from you, I can be at rest and not too sad. But when a prolonged and gloomy silence seems to threaten me with the estrangement of my master—when day by day I await a letter and when day by day disappointment comes to fling me back into overwhelming sorrow, and the sweet delight of seeing your handwriting and reading your counsel escapes me as a vision that is vain, then fever claims me—I lose appetite and sleep—I pine away. May I write to you again next May? I would rather wait a year, but it is impossible—it is too long. . . .”

“I have never heard French spoken but once since I left Brussels—and then it sounded like music in my ears—every word was most precious to me because it reminded me of you—I love French for your sake with all my heart and soul.

“Farewell my dear Master—may God protect you with special care and crown you with peculiar blessings. . . .”

§

One more revealing episode and then, except for its later flowering in *Villette*, the story of Charlotte Brontë and M. and Mme Heger, in all its bitterness and beauty, can end. Frederika Macdonald gives us this reminiscence of Madame Heger. When she, Frederika, was fifteen years old and a pupil at the pensionnat, she believed she had been the victim of a crass injustice at M. Heger’s hand, and she sat in the Refectory, elbows on the table, head between her hands, “in the frame of mind in which anarchists are made”. It was the Refectory where Charlotte, eighteen years before, used to write her homesick letters to Emily. Madame Heger came into the room and sat at the table opposite Frederika.

“I broke out passionately, complaining that I could not be expected to obey rules when I was unjustly treated: I could bear anything else, but I could not support injustice.

“‘Pas l’injustice,’ I protested, ‘J’obéirais à tout, je suppor-

terais tout : mais, pas l'injustice, non, madame, non, je ne saurais supporter l'injustice.'

"Cependant, mon enfant, il faut savoir la supporter. Que faire? Seriez-vous la seule personne au monde qui ne connaîtrait pas l'injustice?"

(Note the words. Remember the portrait of Madame Beck in *Villette*. Contrast it with this. In all my researches I have not traced one old pupil who speaks hardly of Mme Heger.)

"I shook my head obstinately : I made a show of resistance : but I was already under Madame Heger's influence. A tremendous change had taken place in me. I was no longer an anarchist. It had already come to me as a conviction that there was nothing grand, but rather something mean, in refusing to bear anything that my other fellow-creatures had to bear, that better and nobler people than I had borne.

"It saddens me,' continued Madame Heger, 'to see a young girl like you, who soon must enter life, and who takes the habit of saying, "I cannot support this, everything else you like, but not this": or "I will renounce everything else, but not that." It does not depend upon us, my child, what we must support, nor what we may, because les convenances or the interests of others demand it, have to renounce. Amongst the many pupils I have known, there have been some passionate like yourself and exalted, who have said like you today, I cannot support injustice, who have seen injustice, where there was no intention to be unjust; who have refused counsel with anger and impatience, and who in their refusal to bow to necessary obligations have been themselves unjust. And they have been unhappy in their lives; most unhappy. Dominated by some fixed idea, the slave of some desire that cannot be accomplished, they have seen enemies in those who would have been their friends. They have created for themselves a sad fate; and I know one of them who died of it.'

"Something in Madame Heger's voice surprised me, for her even tones quavered and broke. I looked up suddenly, her face was ashen white and her lips blue. I was struck to the heart. I knew not why, but in some way I instinctively felt that, through my fault, she was in pain. . . ."

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“Dominated by some fixed idea, the slave of some desire that cannot be accomplished”—these are almost the exact words of Charlotte in her last letter to M. Heger.

§

If you will leave Brussels by the Porte de Namur and the Chaussée d’Ixelles and go on through the modern suburbs till you reach the green and open country, you will come upon the red-roofed village of Boitsfort. Pass its dank pond, spread with water-lilies, climb a cobbled street, and there on the hillside, between a garden of tall trees and the green meadows, you will find its little walled and silent cemetery. A brief distance from the gateway, and on your right, is a grave surmounted by a massive and slanted tombstone and enclosed within ornamental railings. The railings are rusty; cobwebs droop across their angles; and a cotoneaster creeps over the top of the stone; but the box-trees and the laurels within the narrow railed garden are trimmed, and there are a few pansies at the grave’s foot. When I was there the inscription on the tilted top of the stone was barely decipherable at first, but as the sun sank lower and laid a shadow in the engraved letters, the name HEGER came out plainly, like a word in invisible ink held before the fire. The gardener, at my request, lifted the cotoneaster away and brushed its leaves and mould from the stone. And I read:

Mademoiselle Maria Heger
1837–1886

Madame C. Heger
née Parent
1805–1890

Monsieur Constantin Heger
Ancien Préfet des Etudes
a L’Athénée de Bruxelles
1809–1896

R. I. P.

IN THE STEPS OF THE BRONTËS

So there slept Marie Pauline Heger, whom Charlotte knew as a child of six and limned, under the name of Désirée, so savagely in *Villette*: "Quelle peste que cette Désirée! Quel poison que cet enfant là!" There, more calm, more reserved and silent than she had ever been, slept Madame Heger, whom the world still chooses to remember as Madame Beck. There, his fires quenched at last, lay Monsieur Heger, the ferocious and tender little Paul Emmanuel. There he lay with wife and child, still very far from the heart of Charlotte beneath the pavement of Haworth church. And as I looked down upon them there, the thought that came to me was this. Adequate justice has never been done to the quietness and dignity, to la convenance and la décence, with which Madame Heger and her family received the poisoned shafts of *Villette*. In her *Biographical Notice of Ellis and Acton Bell* Charlotte, so loyal to her family, so savage to others, wrote, "This notice has been written because I felt it a sacred duty to wipe the dust off their gravestones, and leave their dear names free from soil." It is necessary to wipe from other graves the dust which has fallen from Charlotte's wrath, and to leave some good names free from soil.

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

“WHAT I wish for now is active exertion,” Charlotte wrote to Ellen, a few weeks after her return to Haworth. “Something in me, which used to be enthusiasm, is tamed down and broken.”

And the active exertion to which she gave herself, as soon as she felt equal to it, was the preparation for “commencing a school”. She must not waste Brussels. It had cost her money enough and misery enough, and that which she had bought must be used. She would have liked to escape from Haworth, and perhaps establish a school by the sea; but her father was getting old and his sight was failing; and she would not leave him. It would be too selfish, she said, to leave him and to pursue interests of her own. So, after some hesitation, she resolved, with her father’s approval and Emily’s unenthusiastic assent, to turn the parsonage into a school, adding on to it, if necessary, a new wing.

Her goal decided, she drove herself towards it, her lips firm, however tamed and broken she might think her heart. “I am driving on with my small matter as well as I can. I have written to all the friends on whom I have the slightest claim, and to some on whom I have no claim—Mrs. B. for example. On her also, I have actually made bold to call.” So she wrote to Ellen; and in the same month, in one of the four extant letters to M. Heger, we find: “That, Monsieur, is my plan. . . . It only remains to find the pupils—rather a difficult thing—for we live rather far from towns and one does not greatly care for crossing the hills which form as it were a barrier around us. But the task that is without difficulty is also without merit; there is great interest in triumphing over obstacles.” She had prospectuses printed, and sent them in sheaves of six or so, to her friends to circulate. Two of these prospectuses, or single-sheet circulars, still exist and are in the Haworth Museum. The one on view draws, I sometimes think, a greater interest than any other exhibit in the museum: the people stand and gaze at it. It is headed in a variety of decorative types, “The Misses

Brontës' Establishment for the Board and Education of a Limited Number of Young Ladies, The Parsonage, Haworth, near Bradford", and the words "The Board and Education" are embellished with "printers' flowers". The terms for Board and Education, are £35 per annum. French, German, Latin, Music, Drawing, Use of Piano Forte, and Washing are extras. Each Young Lady is to be provided with One Pair of Sheets, Pillow-cases, Four Towels, a Dessert- and Tea-spoon. The last stipulation states, "A Quarter's Notice or a Quarter's Board, is required previous to the removal of a pupil." At first Charlotte assessed the fees at £25 per annum, but then she took her courage in her hands and made them £35.

But no young ladies came up the steep Haworth street with their pillow-cases, dessert-spoons and tea-spoons. Never a young lady of good extraction and delicate nurture, bringing a Quarter's Board. All that summer went by, and, look where they would, there was not a pupil in sight. For all the parents who were ready with their £35, Charlotte might have taken her pen and written fifty. And in the winter we find her writing to Ellen: "Everyone wishes us well; but there are no pupils to be had. We have no present intention, however, of breaking our hearts on the subject, still less of feeling mortified at defeat. The effort must be beneficial, whatever the result may be, because it teaches us experience and an additional knowledge of this world. I send you two more circulars." But in spite of the two more circulars and the fine spirit they shew, we can read in these lines the beginning of the end. The two new circulars achieved no more than the many which had been scattered before them, and a month afterwards we see Charlotte once again coming down from a hill. "I fear you are giving yourself too much trouble on our account. Depend upon it, if you were to persuade a mamma to bring her child to Haworth the aspect of the place would frighten her, and she would probably take the dear girl back instanter. We are glad we have made the attempt, and we will not be cast down because it has not succeeded."

§

"Haworth, Thursday, July 30th, 1845.

"My birthday—showery, breezy, cool. I am twenty-seven years old to-day. This morning Anne and I opened the papers we wrote four years since, on my twenty-third birthday. This paper we intend, if all be well, to open on my thirtieth—three years hence, in 1848. Since the 1841 paper the following events have taken place. Our school scheme has been abandoned, and instead Charlotte and I went to Brussels on the 8th of February, 1842. Branwell left his place at Luddenden Foot. C. and I returned from Brussels, November 8th, 1842, in consequence of Aunt's death. Branwell went to Thorp Green as a tutor, where Anne still continued, January 1843. Charlotte returned to Brussels the same month, and, after staying a year, came back again on New Year's Day 1844. Anne left her situation at Thorp Green of her own accord, June 1845. . . .

"I should have mentioned that last summer the school scheme was revived in full vigour. We had prospectuses printed, despatched letters to all acquaintances imparting our plans, and did our little all; but it was found no go. Now I don't desire a school at all, and none of us have any great longing for it. We have cash enough for our present wants, with a prospect of accumulation. We are all in decent health, only that Papa has a complaint in his eyes, and with the exception of B., who, I hope, will be better and do better hereafter. I am quite contented for myself: not as idle as formerly, altogether as hearty, and having learnt to make the most of the present and (not?) long for the future with the fidgetiness that I cannot do all I wish; seldom or ever troubled with nothing to do, and merely desiring that everybody could be as comfortable as myself and as undesponding, and then we should have a very tolerable world of it. . . .

"Keeper and Flossy are well, also the canary acquired four years since. We are now all at home, and likely to be there some time. Branwell went to Liverpool on Tuesday to stay a week. Tabby has just been teasing me to turn as formerly to 'Pilloputate'. Anne and I should have picked the black currants if it had been fine and sunshiny. I must hurry off now to my turning and

ironing. I have plenty of work on hands, and writing, and am altogether full of business. With best wishes for the whole house till 1848, July 30th, and as much longer as may be—I conclude.
EMILY BRONTË.

These are excerpts from the second of the two quadrennial “papers” which Emily wrote in secret for Anne and which Mr. Nicholls found in the little pin-box some fifty years after they had been folded and put there. In excellent spirits she has drawn at the foot of her last page a pen-and-ink sketch of herself seated in her little bedroom with her folding rosewood desk on her knees, and Keeper stretched at her feet, his black muzzle between his paws, and Flossy, Anne’s King Charles spaniel, asleep on her bed beneath the window. Keeper, the mastiff-bull, was Emily’s dog; Flossy, the soft spaniel, Anne’s; is there perhaps something significant here; can our characters be assessed by the dogs we keep?

Now a few excerpts from Anne’s corresponding paper; and once again we are struck by the similarity, in places almost verbal, of two documents written away from each other.

“Thursday, July the 31st, 1845. Yesterday was Emily’s birthday, and the time when we should have opened our 1845 paper, but by mistake we opened it to-day instead. How many things have happened since it was written—some pleasant, some far otherwise. Yet I was then at Thorp Green, and now I am only just escaped from it. I was wishing to leave it then, and if I had known that I had four years longer to stay how wretched I should have been; but during my stay I have had some very unpleasant and undreamt-of experience of human nature. . . .

“Branwell has left Luddenden Foot, and been a tutor at Thorp Green, and had much tribulation and ill health. He was very ill on Thursday, but he went with John Brown to Liverpool, where he now is, I suppose; and we hope he will be better and do better in future. . . .

“Charlotte has lately been to Hathersage, in Derbyshire, on a visit of three weeks to Ellen Nussey. She is now sitting sewing in the dining-room. Emily is ironing upstairs. I am sitting in the dining-room in the rocking-chair before the fire with my feet on the fender. Papa is in the parlour. Tabby and Martha are, I think, in the kitchen. Keeper and

Flossy are, I do not know where. Little Dick is hopping in his cage. . . . I wonder how we shall all be and where and how situated on the thirtieth of July, 1848, when, if we are all alive, Emily will be just 30. I shall be in my 29th year, Charlotte in her 33rd, and Branwell in his 32nd; and what changes shall we have seen and known; and shall we be much changed ourselves? I hope not, for the worse at least. I for my part cannot well be *flatter* or older in mind than I am now. Hoping for the best, I conclude. ANNE BRONTË."

Apart from the instant memory that the year 1848, like General Février, turned traitor and left Branwell dead, Emily dead, and Anne about to die, the thing of most interest in these documents is the evidence that the shadow of Branwell had fallen across the house. Branwell, as Emily recalls, went to Thorp Green with Anne in January 1843 to take up the post of tutor in the home of the invalid clergyman, the Rev. Edmund Robinson, Anne being governess to the Robinson girls. In June 1845, after she had been at Thorp Green four years, and Branwell two and a half, Anne suddenly, and of her own accord, left the situation for ever—"escaped from it"—and came home. During her stay, as she says in a mysterious sentence, she had had some very unpleasant and undreamt-of experience of human nature. Branwell, she adds, had had much tribulation and ill-health, and had gone away with John Brown to Liverpool; and then she reproduces in identical words Emily's simple and uncensorious comment, "We hope he will be better and do better in future."

Behind this gentle record these facts lie hidden: that, just as Charlotte, the governess, had fallen in love with her employer's husband, so Branwell, the tutor, had fallen in love with his employer's wife, a woman seventeen years older than he; that he had made love to her, or attempted to; that her invalid husband, either by accident or from her report, had learned of the affair; that he had immediately dismissed Branwell with a threat of exposure if he came near the family again; and that Branwell's paroxysms of despair and bouts of desperate drinking at the "Black Bull" and at home had compelled them to send him away for a while in the care of their near neighbour and his best friend in Haworth, John Brown,

the sexton. That this Old Knave of Trumps should have been given the custody of Branwell shows how little the parsonage knew of the high-jinks and revels at the "Black Bull" when the Lodge of the Three Graces was in session.

Unlike her sisters Charlotte does not wrap Branwell's disgrace and weakness in the mercy of a few brief words. In June she had gone to join Ellen Nussey at Hathersage Vicarage in Derbyshire. Henry Nussey, Ellen's brother, who had once proposed to Charlotte because he wanted help in a school, had just been appointed to the vicariate, and had promptly married an Emily Prescott, presumably because he wanted help in the parish. He was now on his honeymoon, and Ellen was in the vicarage preparing it for the new vicar and his bride. She had insisted that Charlotte should come and sustain her in the assembling of furniture, the decorating of rooms, and the choosing of servants. This visit of Charlotte's to Derbyshire is of importance because of the part it played in the creation of *Jane Eyre*; and we shall therefore return later to Hathersage and its lovely, hill-embowered vale. She stayed there three weeks and when July was more than half spent returned to Haworth, full of thoughts of M. Heger because she had met a stranger in the train and, recognising him for a Frenchman, had opened a conversation with him that she might hear M. Heger's language again—she who usually shuddered and turned her face aside if a stranger spoke to her. "It sounded like music in my ears—every word was most precious to me because it reminded me of you—I love French for your sake with all my heart and soul. Farewell, my dear Master."

Entering the parsonage, she found Branwell there. Branwell who should have been at Thorp Green. He was dishevelled and distraught, and Anne quickly told her the story. Next day Charlotte wrote it to Ellen.

"It was ten o'clock at night when I got home. I found Branwell ill: he is so very often owing to his own fault. I was not therefore shocked at first, but when Anne informed me of the immediate cause of his present illness, I was greatly shocked. He had last Thursday received a note from Mr. Robinson sternly dismissing him, intimating that he had discovered his proceedings, which he characterised as bad beyond expression,

and charging him on pain of exposure to break off instantly and for ever all communication with every member of his family. We have had sad work with Branwell ever since. He thought of nothing but stunning or drowning his distress of mind. No one in the house could have rest. At last we have been obliged to send him from home with someone to look after him: he has written to me this morning, and expresses some sense of contrition for his frantic folly; he promises amendment on his return, but so long as he remains at home, I scarce dare hope for peace in the house.'

Now it is a symptom, small but subtly revealing, that Mrs. Gaskell in quoting this letter deliberately omitted the words "for his frantic folly; he promises amendment on his return", and substituted dots for them. Why this extraordinary little omission? I can only diagnose one cause: Mrs. Gaskell, who so discreetly hid Charlotte's guilty love, seized upon Branwell's, exposed it in full detail, and was driven to remove this glimmer of light in it because, excellent novelist that she was, she rejoiced in having this splendid dark back-cloth to set off the whiteness of her heroine. She poured on to her pages all the scandal she had heard of Branwell and Mrs. Robinson, none of which had any source except the ravings of Branwell, whose brain had certainly slipped. She set it out with such joyous indiscretion that she was forced to apologise publicly, retract every word that defamed the nameless but easily identified lady, and expunge all such matter from future editions. Listen, and you will hear the surging exultation of the excited raconteuse.

"All the disgraceful incidents came out. Branwell was in no state to conceal his agony of remorse, or, strange to say, his agony of guilty love, from any dread of shame. He gave passionate way to his feelings, he shocked and distressed those loving sisters inexpressibly; the blind father sat stunned, sorely tempted to curse the profligate woman who had tempted his boy—his only son—into the deep disgrace of deadly crime." She goes on to say that the woman had professed an equal love and adds in a knowing aside, "we shall see how her profession held good". She declares that the woman met Branwell secretly and proposed an elopement, and comments, "he little knew how bad a depraved woman can be". She states that the invalid husband

made a will in which what property he left to his wife was bequeathed on the condition that she never saw Branwell again—a quite untrue statement as a moment's glance at the will would have shewn her; she tells us that after the husband's death the widow sent a groom "in hot haste" to Haworth, who summoned Branwell to the "Black Bull" and told him not to come near her lest she forfeited a fortune. "Then the groom came out, paid his bill, mounted his horse and was off." A most picturesque incident. Branwell, she says, bled like a calf and fell down in a kind of fit. And then comes a very fine passage. "Let her live and flourish! He died, his pockets filled with her letters"—also quite untrue—"which he had carried about his person, in order that he might read them as often as he wished. . . . When I think of him I change my cry to Heaven. Let her live and repent!"

Turn up the back files of *The Times* and in the advertisement columns of the issue for May 26th, 1857, you can read this letter:

"Dear Sirs, As solicitor for and on behalf of the Rev. W. Gaskell, and of Mrs. Gaskell his wife, the latter of whom is authoress of the *Life of Charlotte Brontë*, I am instructed to retract every statement contained in that work which imputes to a widowed lady, referred to but not named therein, any breach of her conjugal, of her maternal, or of her social duties, and more especially of the statement contained in chapter 13 of the first volume, and in chapter 2 of the second volume, which imputes to the lady in question a guilty intercourse with the late Branwell Brontë. All those statements were made upon information believed to be well-founded, but which, upon investigation, with the additional evidence furnished to me by you, I have ascertained not to be trustworthy. I am therefore authorised not only to retract the statements in question, but to express the deep regret of Mrs. Gaskell that she should have been led to make them.—I am, dear sirs, yours truly, WILLIAM SHAEN.

"Messrs. Newton & Robinson, Solicitors, York."

One would have supposed that Charlotte, touched by the strange parallel between Branwell's experience and her own, would have been ready with some forgiveness. But it was not so.

She had nothing but contempt for his "frantic folly"; and this at a time when she was pestering M. Heger with her pitiable letters! From now till his death she could hardly bring herself to speak to the brother who had once been her chosen partner and mate. "I wish I could say one word in his favour, but I cannot," she writes. And later, "It was very forced work to address him."

She was no less severe on Mrs. Robinson, about whom she immediately believed all that Branwell related—indeed she was almost undoubtedly the main channel through which Mrs. Gaskell derived the substance of her libellous paragraphs. "A worse woman I believe hardly exists; the more I hear of her, the more deeply she revolts me," is one of her remarks; and another, "she is a hopeless being calculated to bring a curse wherever she goes".

And yet the only difference between Charlotte's story and Branwell's was that she had tried to confront her defeat with courage and the dignity of silence (except to the beloved), and Branwell was making no attempt to do either. But perhaps it is a great difference.

§

Branwell's only method of dealing with his love-sick misery was to stupefy himself with gin, or escape into dreams at the price of a little opium. "A woman still lives at Haworth," Mme Duclaux wrote in 1882, "who used to help in the house-work at the 'Black Bull'. She still remembers how, in the early morning, pale, red-eyed, he would come into the passage of the inn, with his beautiful bow and sweep of the lifted hat, with his courteous smile and ready 'Good morning, Anne!' Then he would turn to the bar, and feeling in his pockets for what small moneys he might have—sixpence, eightpence, tenpence, as the case might be—he would order so much gin and sit there drinking till it was all gone, then still sit there silent; or sometimes he would passionately speak of the woman he loved, of her beauty, sweetness, of how he longed to see her again; he loved to speak of her even to a dog; he would talk of her by the hour to his dog."

And evening after evening he sloped down the lane to the back parlour of the "Bull" and sat there by the fireplace with his glass and his despair. We spoke earlier of his celebrated letter to Jqhn Brown, "Old Knave of Trumps", and decided that it was easy to forgive in a young man of twenty-two; we must balance that letter now with one to his friend, Francis Grundy, which, with its self-pity, its snobbery, its unpleasant hints at his lady's favours, and its open covetousness, would be very hard to forgive, were it not so obviously the product of a mind diseased. As the woman at the "Black Bull" suggested, he was ready to romance about Mrs. Robinson's love to anyone he met. Such wild and comforting delusions, and such loose-tongued publication of them, are frequent accompaniments of morphia mania.

"I fear you will burn my present letter on recognising the handwriting; but if you will read it through, you will perhaps rather pity than spurn the distress of mind which could prompt my communication, after a silence of nearly three (to me) eventful years. While very ill and confined to my room, I wrote to you two months ago, hearing you were resident engineer of the Skipton Railway, to the inn at Skipton. I never received any reply, and as my letter asked only for one day of your society, to ease a very weary mind in the company of a friend who *always* had what I always wanted, but most want now, *cheerfulness*, I am sure you never received my letter, or your heart would have prompted an answer. . . . In a letter begun in the spring of 1845 and never finished, owing to incessant attacks of illness, I tried to tell you that I was tutor to the son of —, a wealthy gentleman whose wife is sister to the wife of —, M.P. for the county of —, and the cousin of Lord —. This lady (though her husband detested me) showed me a degree of kindness which, when I was deeply grieved one day at her husband's conduct, ripened into declarations of more than ordinary feeling. My admiration of her mental and personal attractions, my knowledge of her unselfish sincerity, her sweet temper, and unwearied care for others, with but unrequited return where most should have been given . . . although she is seventeen years my senior, all combined to an attachment on my part, and led to reciprocations which I had little looked

for. During nearly three years I had daily 'troubled pleasure, soon chastised by fear'. Three months since I received a furious letter from my employer, threatening to shoot me if I returned from my vacation, which I was passing at home; and letters from her lady's-maid and physician informed me of the outbreak, only checked by her firm courage and resolution that whatever harm came to her, none should come to me. . . .

"I have lain during nine long weeks, utterly shattered in body and broken down in mind. The probability of her becoming free to give me herself and estate never rose to drive away the prospect of her decline under her present grief. I dreaded, too, the wreck of my mind and body, which, God knows! during a short life have been severely tried. Eleven continuous nights of sleepless horror reduced me to almost blindness; and, being taken into Wales to recover, the sweet scenery, the sea, the sound of music caused me fits of unspeakable distress. You will say, 'What a fool!' but if you knew the many causes I have for sorrow, which I cannot even hint at here, you would perhaps pity as well as blame. At the kind request of Mr. Macaulay and Mr. Baines, I have striven to arouse my mind by writing something worthy of being read, but I really cannot do so. Of course you will despise the writer of all this. I can only answer that the writer does the same, and would not wish to live if he did not hope that work and change may yet restore him. . . ."

Anybody who has received a wordy letter from one whose mental ratchets are loose will recognise this as of the same kind. A poem of Branwell's written at the same time is witness both to his lost talent and his flaccid, drooping despair.

I see a corpse upon the waters lie,
With eyes turned, swelled and sightless to the sky,
And arms outstretched to move, as wave on wave
Upbears it in its boundless billowy grave.
Not time, but ocean, thins its flowing hair;
Decay, not sorrow, lays its forehead bare;
Its members move, but not in thankless toil,
For seas are milder than this world's turmoil;
Corruption robs its lips and cheeks of red,
But wounded vanity grieves not the dead;

•

IN THE STEPS OF THE BRONTËS

And, though those members hasten to decay,
No pang of suffering takes their strength away.
With untormented eye, and heart, and brain,
Through calm and storm it floats across the main;
Though love and joy have perished long ago,
Its bosom suffers not one pang of woe;
Though weeds and worms its cherished beauty hide,
It feels not wounded vanity nor pride;
Though journeying towards some far-off shore,
It needs no care nor gold to float it o'er;
Though launched in voyage for eternity,
It needs not think upon what is *to be*;
Though naked, helpless, and companionless,
It feels not poverty, nor knows distress.
Ah, corpse! if thou couldst tell my aching mind
What scenes of sorrow thou hast left behind,
How sad the life which, breathing, thou hast led,
How free from strife thy sojourn with the dead;
I would assume thy place—would long to be
A world-wide wanderer o'er the waves with thee!
I have a misery, where thou hast none;
My heart beats, bursting, whilst thine lies like stone;
My veins throb wild, whilst thine are dead and dry;
And woes, not waters, dim my restless eye. . . .

§

Emily's attitude to this sapless and fast-failing brother was very different from Charlotte's. One who brings home the fallen fledglings from the moor to warm and tend them will have some compassion for a young man in pain, whatever its cause. Indeed it looks to me as if Emily only began to love Branwell fully when his helplessness was complete and all were condemning his sins. This is the high Franciscan way: the greater the sins, the greater the love. True she once called him in her impatient fashion "a hopeless being" (which seems to have been a family phrase), but what are a few irritable words compared with the facts that she waited up for him night after night when he was down at the "Bull"; that she let him quietly into the house and helped his tottering steps up to his bedroom; that she rushed in to save him one night when he had set his bed on fire;

and that, if a firm tradition in Haworth is correct, she would run through the churchyard tombs to the back window of the "Bull" and tapping on it, warn him that his father was approaching the inn's front door? Did not St. Francis himself once hurl the tiles from the roof when his brethren had disobeyed him? Emily could hurl the tiles occasionally; she punished Keeper quite brutally once when her wrath was inflamed, but that was not Emily in her strength; and she bathed his wounds afterwards in her remorse. As Charlotte says in her Preface to *Wuthering Heights*, "she held that mercy and forgiveness are the divinest attributes of the Great Being who made both man and woman, and that what clothes the Godhead in glory can disgrace no form of feeble humanity". Yes, Charlotte could write fine-sounding words about mercy and forgiveness; but Emily practised these things. She practised them when Branwell came home from the "Black Bull". She wrote for her own eyes only:

Do I despise the timid deer
Because his limbs are fleet with fear?
Or would I mock the wolf's death-howl
Because his form is gaunt and foul?
Or hear with joy the leveret's cry
Because it cannot bravely die?

These lines are such as St. Francis might have written twelve hundred years before. Now and then, as the centuries pass, there are those who understand him.

When Branwell was dead she set down these words in her secret book:

How few, of all the hearts that loved,
Are grieving for thee now;
And why should mine to-night be moved
With such a sense of woe?

Too often thus, when left alone,
Where none my thoughts can see,
Comes back a word, a passing tone
From thy strange history.

IN THE STEPS OF THE BRONTËS

Sometimes I seem to see thee rise,
A glorious child again;
All virtues beaming from thine eyes
That ever honoured men:

Courage and truth, a generous breast
Where sinless sunshine lay:
A being whose very presence blest
Like gladsome summer day.

Oh, fairly spread thy early sail,
And fresh, and pure, and free,
Was the first impulse of the gale
Which urged life's wave for thee!

Why did the pilot, too confiding,
Dream o'er that ocean's foam,
And trust in Pleasure's careless guiding
To bring his vessel home? . . .

It recks not now, when all is over!
But yet my heart will be
A mourner still, though friend and lover
Have both forgotten thee!

Emily, whose imagination could experience vicariously the agony and vengeance of Heathcliff, outcast from the world and defeated lover, and know the thrill of the artist in writing it down, was able to feel a little with Branwell, and pity him.

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

THE school plan a failure; Anne without a situation; herself without a situation; herself nearly thirty and without hope of marriage; her father nearly seventy and facing disablement from blindness; Branwell now helpless and a new burden—Charlotte's poor protégé and patient, the Brontë Family, whom she had so laboured to strengthen, was in a weaker condition than it had ever been. Its strength was ebbing rather than rising. None of her schemes succeeded; none of her dreams came near fulfilment. It was as if God were against her.

And then one autumn day, when she was alone in the living-room, she saw Emily's little folding rosewood desk on the table or the window-seat. It was probably lying open with some of its contents on the top; for we cannot believe that Charlotte deliberately opened it. But she was not a perfect character, her inquisitiveness was as keen as another's; and she yielded to the temptation to pick up a little notebook of Emily's and look inside. Poems. This was no surprise because she knew that Emily wrote poems which she allowed no one to see. She began to read. Step on the slippery slope to which your curiosity has beckoned you, and your glissade will carry you a long way before you can stop yourself. Charlotte read on and on. How could she, whose thoughts were never far from M. Heger, stop reading when her eyes were on words like these:

Sweet Love of youth, forgive, if I forget thee,
While the world's tide is bearing me along;
Other desires and other hopes beset me,
Hopes which obscure, but cannot do thee wrong!

No later light has lightened up my heaven,
No second morn has ever shone for me;
All my life's bliss from thy dear life was given,
All my life's bliss is in the grave with thee.

IN THE STEPS OF THE BRONTËS

But, when the days of golden dreams had perished,
And even Despair was powerless to destroy;
Then did I learn how existence could be cherished,
Strengthened, and fed without the aid of joy.

Then did I check the tears of useless passion—
Weaned my young soul from yearning after thine. .

One can imagine her gasp of admiration. Here were some of the loveliest words that had ever been written about love and its loss. She read on in amazement and delight.

The linnet in the rocky dells,
The moor-lark in the air,
The bee among the heather bells
That hide my lady fair. . . .

Blow, west wind, by the lonely mound,
And murmur, summer streams—
There is no need of other sound
To soothe my lady's dreams.

Oh, this was perfect. Better than anything she herself had written. And this!

Still, let my tyrants know, I am not doomed to wear
Year after year in gloom, and desolate despair;
A messenger of Hope comes every night to me,
And offers for short life, eternal liberty.

He comes with western winds, with evenings wandering airs,
With that clear dusk of heaven that brings the thickest stars.
Winds take a pensive tone, and stars a tender fire,
And visions rise, and change, that kill me with desire.

Desire for nothing known in my maturer years,
When Joy grew mad with awe, at counting future tears.
When, if my spirit's sky was full of flashes warm,
I knew not whence they came, from sun or thunder-storm.

IN THE STEPS OF THE BRONTËS

But, first, a hush of peace—a soundless calm descends;
The struggle of distress, and fierce impatience ends;
Mute music soothes my breast—unuttered harmony,
That I could never dream, till Earth was lost to me.

Then dawns the Invisible; the Unseen its truth reveals
My outward sense is gone, my inward essence feels:
Its wings are almost free—its home, its harbour found,
Measuring the gulf, it stoops and dares the final bound.

Better than *her* poems? Why, better than anything any woman had ever written! In her thin, narrow breast Charlotte's heart beat fast. She has told us so. "They stirred my heart like the sound of a trumpet when I read them alone in secret. . . . I know no woman that ever lived ever wrote such poetry before. . . . To my ear they had also a peculiar music—wild, melancholy, and elevating." And even as she sins, reading Emily's poems without permission, let us remember this: it needed thirty years and more before Emily's writings found a wide recognition, but before that there were one or two solitaries who perceived their quality; there was a Mr. Enoch in 1846 of whom we shall hear; there was Sidney Dobell in 1850; there was Matthew Arnold in 1855; there was Swinburne in the 'eighties; but the first of them all was Charlotte, on this autumn day in 1845. From that day she was Emily's agent, fighting Emily first and then the world, to secure recognition for her sister.

No, first she had to fight herself. It cannot have been easy to confess to her sister that she had deliberately read all her secret poems; but it was necessary to overthrow her shame if she was to persuade Emily that the poems must be published. She overthrew it and opened the fight with Emily. It was a classic battle; a real, first-class family row. This was an occasion when Emily flung the tiles. "It took hours to reconcile her to the discovery I had made, and days to persuade her that such poems merited publication."

Aye; it went on for days. I imagine it was fought in the living-room, in the kitchen, in the bedrooms, and on the moors; round after round; Charlotte down on the ropes more than once, but refusing to take the count and rising to resume the contest. "I'll lay me down to bleed awhile; then rise to fight again." It is not

often we are on Charlotte's side against Emily, but in this affair we cheer her on heartily, invisible ghosts at the ringside. We owe *Jane Eyre* to Charlotte and some unforgettable chapters in *Villette*, but the greatest thing she gave us was Emily. Of course she won; if not in the tenth round, then in the twentieth. "Being once up, I don't mean to sit down till I've got what I want."

And I'm pretty sure that Emily was less displeased at the issue than she pretended to be. No character is all of a piece, and Emily was not only a detached mystic, not only a contemptuous "old stoic"; many of her poems, and not least *The Old Stoic*, show us that she had once harboured a "lust of fame", had held "wealth and power, glory's wreath and pleasure's flower" to be "beings divine"; and an enthusiasm like Charlotte's must have had its sweetness for her, however she rated her for an unwarrantable liberty and flung the furniture around. One's actions are the measure of one's real desires, and the facts are that she consented to the proposed publication, contriving to satisfy both sides of her nature by insisting on a *nom-de-guerre*; and then sat down to write *Wuthering Heights* for publication.

Anne in the general excitement had brought out a few poems of her own for Charlotte to see; an incident we should have dealt with sooner, but, alas, Anne, the gentle, is all too often shouldered away from a biographer's view by her two more strenuous sisters. "Meantime," says Charlotte, "my younger sister quietly produced some of her own compositions, intimating that, since Emily's had given me pleasure, I might like to look at hers. I could not but be a partial judge, yet I thought that these verses, too, had a sweet, sincere pathos of their own." Charlotte herself had an immense corpus of verse from which to choose the best, and soon the new scheme, a publication of the best of all three sisters' poems, was riding high on the tide, a strong wind in its sails, and its mooring ropes singing under the strain.

Excitement is happiness; a new hope is happiness; and Charlotte was happy again. The living-room was now the office of The Brontës' agent; it was again her G.H.Q. for a new phase of her campaign against the vast embattled world that lay beyond the hills. They had fun, we can be sure, choosing their pseudonyms. Charlotte, Emily, and Anne became the sexless

Currer, Ellis, and Acton; and Brontë became Bell—perhaps after a glance through the window at their father's curate, Mr. Arthur Bell Nicholls. They selected the poems, enough to make, as they imagined, a decent-sized book of about two hundred pages. And then Charlotte really got to work. She sent the manuscript to one publisher after another, in the company of an exceedingly business-like and masculine letter. As with the manuscripts of most unknown authors it met one of two things: either rejection after long delay or the silence of the dead. At last, acting upon some friendly advice from Messrs. Chambers, of Edinburgh, she got into communication with Messrs Aylott and Jones, of Paternoster Row. She represented herself to them as C. Brontë, the chosen agent of three retiring persons, Messrs. C., E., and A. Bell. Only read her letters to Messrs. Aylott and Jones, and you will catch her pride in her pose as a man of affairs, her relish for her business-like phrases, and her determination that these gentlemen should not think that C. Brontë was some silly woman but a man who was well used to business transactions and knew a thing or two about publishing and publishers. You will watch her self-assurance increasing as she advances from applicant to client. The excitement, the doubts, the dismay, and the high hopes of the sisters are here in these letters for all who have eyes to see.

“GENTLEMEN—May I request to be informed whether you would undertake the publication of a collection of short poems in one volume, 8vo. If you object to publishing the work at your own risk, would you undertake it on the author's account? I am, gentlemen, your obedient humble servant, C. BRONTË.”

“GENTLEMEN—Since you agree to undertake the publication of the work respecting which I applied to you, I should wish now to know the cost of paper and printing. I will then send you the necessary remittance, together with the manuscript. I should like it to be printed in one octavo volume, of the same quality of paper and size of type as Moxon's last edition of Wordsworth.”

“GENTLEMEN—I send a draft for £31 10s., being the amount of your estimate. I suppose there is nothing now to prevent your immediately commencing the printing of the work. When you acknowledge receipt of the draft, will you state how soon it will be completed?”

IN THE STEPS OF THE BRONTËS

“GENTLEMEN—I have received the proof sheet and return it corrected. If there is any doubt at all about the printer’s competency to correct errors I would prefer submitting each sheet to the inspection of the authors, because such a mistake, for instance, as *tumbling* stars instead of *trembling* would suffice to throw an air of absurdity over a whole poem.”

What author has not suffered this consummate despair over a misprint?

“The printing and paper appear to me satisfactory. Of course I wish to have the work out as soon as possible, but I am still more anxious that it should be got up in a manner creditable to the publishers and agreeable to the authors.”

What author is not blending his heart with Charlotte’s here?

“GENTLEMEN—C., E., and A. Bell are now preparing for the press”—note the grandeur—“a work of fiction, consisting of three distinct and unconnected tales, which may be published either together, as a work of three volumes, of the ordinary novel size, or separately as single volumes, as shall be deemed most advisable. It is not their intention to publish these tales on their own account. They direct me to ask you whether you would be disposed to undertake the work, after having, of course, by due inspection of the MS., ascertained that its contents are such as to warrant an expectation of success. An early answer will oblige, as, in case of your negativing the proposal, inquiry must be made of other publishers.”

This is in the grand manner, but Charlotte didn’t know as she shaped her fine phrases—and probably never knew—how grand was the matter contained in those phrases. The three-fold fire was alive again in the parsonage. Once again the three sisters, much encouraged by having a book in the press, were writing, writing, in their living-room, just as they used to do when they were younger. They were writing by lamplight on the square, mahogany table, after their father had wound the clock and gone up to bed, and Tabby was asleep in her little chamber above the peat-room. Charlotte was writing *The Professor*, Emily *Wuthering Heights*, and Anne *Agnes Grey*. And this time Fame was waiting without to take the manuscript in his hand. “Burn then, little lamp; glimmer straight and clear—Hush, a rustling wing stirs, methinks, the air.”

Wycoller Hall, ruined facade and front door

Wycoller Hall, ruined fireplace and main room

§

But for the present the world had no place for the poems of Currer, Ellis, and Acton Bell. What was the outcome of that first assault, launched with such *élan* and hope? How went the day for that little squadron of poems, when it took the field? The book was published in May 1846; and hope pulsed in the rooms of the parsonage. The *Athenaeum* reviewed it, not unkindly; the *Critic* reviewed it in the highest terms; it even used the word "genius". Hope soared. Here is the everlasting author desiring that the world shall know he has been called a genius:

"GENTLEMEN—I am directed by the Messrs. Bell to acknowledge the receipt of the *Critic* and the *Athenaeum* containing notices of the poems. They now think that a further sum of £10 may be devoted to advertisements, leaving you to select such channels as you deem most advisable. They would wish the following extract from the *Critic* to be appended to each advertisement: 'They in whose hearts are chords strung by Nature to sympathise with the beautiful and the true, will recognise in these compositions the presence of more genius than it was supposed this utilitarian age had devoted to the loftier exercises of the intellect.' "

One almost wishes she had signed it "The Genius C. B."

The *Dublin University Magazine* reviewed it benevolently but with a discriminating benevolence, and Charlotte in her love for a praising critic was moved as many another first author has been, to write her thanks to the editor.

"SIR—I thank you in my own name and that of my brothers Ellis and Acton, for the indulgent notice that appeared in your last number of our first humble efforts in literature"—and so on. "I again thank you heartily and beg to subscribe myself—Your constant and grateful reader, CURRER BELL."

Two copies were sold.

One appears to have been bought by a Mr. F. Enoch, of the Corn Market, Warwick, who liked the poems well enough to ask the publishers to obtain for him the autographs of the three poets. They were willing to accommodate him, and the three signatures may be seen today in the Haworth Museum,

framed and hanging on the wall : Currer Bell's written with a fine gusto and flourish ; Ellis Bell's firm, masculine, but not *quite* indifferent ; Acton Bell's neat, formal, and modest. Mr. F. Enoch is honoured in his grave. I hope his spirit knows this. He was the one and only dove who came flying to the Ark with the promise of dry land one day. Who bought the other copy no one knows. Whoever he was, may he rest in peace, and the earth lie lightly on his grave. The reviews ceased, and in September Charlotte, agent for the Bells, wrote to the publishers in one of the last of her business-like letters, "As the work has received no further notice from any periodical, I presume the demand for it has not greatly increased."

There is a little tragedy in that word "greatly". This *peripeteia* was not on the kingly scale, but it was perfect of its kind. Charlotte, having scaled mountains in her imagination, was down on the level plains again. The poems, like the school plan, like their hopes of Branwell, like everything she attempted, had failed, and they were £46 the poorer.

It would not have been the real Charlotte had she failed to meet this absolute defeat with something of an air, and with a sardonic jest on her lips. Among the exhibits in the Museum are a surplice-box of Mr. Brontë's and a small family trunk. Lift their lids—if the admirable custodian, Mr. Gilliam Mitchell, is not about—and you will see that the surplice-box is lined with the unwanted sheets of the *Monthly Review* for September 1752 ; and the trunk with those of a novel, *Delicate Investigation*. I'm sure that Charlotte as a child had often tried to read the printed words in these linings ; and now, before the whole edition of their poems was scrapped, she sent a copy each to Wordsworth, De Quincey, Tennyson, and Lockhart, with this letter.

"SIR—My relatives, Ellis and Acton Bell, and myself, heedless of the warning of various respectable publishers, have committed the rash act of printing a volume of poems. The consequences predicted have, of course, overtaken us : our book is found to be a drug ; no man needs it or heeds it. In the space of a year our publisher has disposed but of two copies, and by what painful efforts he succeeded in getting rid of these two, himself only knows. Before transferring the edition to the trunk-makers, we have decided on distributing as presents a few copies

of what we cannot sell; and we beg to offer you one in acknowledgment of the pleasure and profit we have often and long derived from your works."

That was no bad way to die.

§

Meanwhile the three novels, in Charlotte's excellent phrase, were being "perseveringly obtruded" upon various publishers, but with no more success than the poems had at first received. Branwell with his drinking and his debts was becoming a heavier anxiety than ever. "There—there is no change but for the worse . . . he refuses to make an effort; he will not work—and at home he is a drain on every resource—an impediment to all happiness." Her father's blindness had advanced so far that his darkness laid yet another darkness over the house—the darkness of the threat of destitution. He groped his way about the rooms, unable to read, unable to recognise his children except against a strong light. White-haired and fumbling, he had to be led up into his high, three-decker pulpit where, unaided by notes or book, he preached into the darkness before him with a greater effectiveness, it is said, than at any time in his ministry, because his courage touched the hearts of his people.

Charlotte fought for him as she always fought for her family. She and Emily went into Manchester to search out the best oculist; they were recommended to a Mr. Wilson and visited him; he said that he would have to examine the eyes; and Charlotte led her father to him. He decided that the cataract was operable and recommended a lodging for them in Boundary Street, Manchester. Charlotte made all arrangements for a stay of some weeks in this grey Manchester street, and on a Wednesday in August led her father there. They had to provide their own board, and Charlotte wrote in despair to Ellen for advice as to how to cater for the nurse who would be in attendance. She was palpably afraid of the nurse. Toothache chose this time to descend upon her; she worried about her father's eyes, about the operation, about her own eyes, and about Emily and Anne alone with Branwell. And on the very morning of the operation, a Monday,

a parcel, all too familiar in shape, arrived by post: *The Professor* rejected once more.

At her father's wish she remained at his side while Mr. Wilson with two assistants extracted the cataract; and she was made proud because the old man shewed such fortitude that the surgeons marvelled. "I neither spoke nor moved till the thing was done." When it was done she made him comfortable in his darkened room and left him there, Mr. Wilson having ordered that he was to remain in bed for four days, speaking and being spoken to as little as possible. She went back to the front room, pushed the rejected *Professor* aside, and, unbeaten, and refusing to be beaten, took up a pencil, brought her scribbling paper close to her eyes, and began a new novel.

"There was no possibility of taking a walk that day. . . ."

These, I suppose, were the first words she set down, for they are the first words of *Jane Eyre*. There, sitting between the darkened room of her father and the grey Manchester street, she had begun that miraculous tale. Miraculous, because the momentum of its telling and the constrained passion, tight-enclosed in it, are so great, breathing into unlikely matter such a living soul, that even now, a hundred years later, while we believe hardly a word of it, we enjoy every moment of it. Still, from her lodging-house room, from the midst of her disasters, and across the tract of a hundred years, she forces our surrender. And surrender not to her only, but to her whole family; to the Brontës, whose agent she had always determined to be. I love to think of her there on the verge, at last, of all-encompassing victory.

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

HER mind left the grey street, and her father in his darkened room, and visited the scenes of her earlier years. It went to Stone Gappe, where she had been a miserable governess; and Stone Gappe became Gateshead Hall where the orphan Jane, ten years old, flung defiance at Mrs. Reed who wouldn't let her children associate with her. "They are not fit to associate with *me*." It went to Cowan Bridge where Charlotte had "suffered to see her sisters perishing" and Cowan Bridge became Lowood Orphan Asylum. "*Je me vengerai.*" It went to The Rydings, Ellen's first home, "Paradise", as Branwell had called it; and The Rydings became Thornfield Hall, the home of Jane's Master. And it is from this point that I want to follow in the steps of Charlotte's mind. We have visited Stone Gappe and Cowan Bridge and seen the rooms and gardens where her mind is straying now; let us follow it to The Rydings at Birstall, and to Hathersage in its beautiful Hope Valley, and to Wyccoller Hall in its deep, leafy dene.

It was the exterior and the gardens of The Rydings that Charlotte used in *Jane Eyre*. For the interior of Thornfield Hall her mind seems to have wandered to Norton Conyers near Harrogate, a fine old mansion which she probably visited when staying at Swarcliffe with the Sidgwicks. At Norton Conyers they shew you "the mad woman's room" where, according to tradition, a lunatic was once kept under guard. The Rydings is not large enough for Mr. Rochester's mansion, but, like Thornfield, it has battlements and a falling garden with beeches and sunk fence, and a walled orchard and kitchen garden. And, until recently, it had also a lightning-blasted tree like the one which stood as omen and symbol to Jane.

When last year I visited The Rydings in its fields at Birstall by the Huddersfield Road, I found that it had been divided into five dwellings, a "house" in the centre and two flats on either side. The clean new brickwork imposed by this conversion, and the shining new paint, contrasted sharply with the old black walls and battlements. Industrialism in the form of mills, factories, and workers' homes had swirled over the pastures around it.

IN THE STEPS OF THE BRONTËS

But there was the falling garden and in the dip the walled orchard. And all, from the terrace of the house to the beck in the bottom, was a wilderness of undergrowth and weeds, but you could see, beneath the self-sown saplings and the scrub, how once it had been lawns and flower-beds and well-ordered paths. The wall of the orchard was down in places, its bricks among the weeds. Like Charlotte in her lodging-house room I saw Jane Eyre and Mr. Rochester against the wall.

“When I got to Thornfield I couldn’t stop,” she used to say; and no wonder for her Master was here in the black and beetling shape of Mr. Rochester. It is said that she wrote the Thornfield chapters in three weeks, which may be true but takes some believing, since there are two hundred and forty pages of them.

Jane, you will remember, fled from Thornfield in the dawn and found a coach which carried her into a north-midland shire and set her down at a place called Whitcross. “Whitcross is no town, nor even a hamlet; it is but a stone pillar set up where four roads meet; whitewashed, I suppose, to be more obvious at a distance and in darkness. Four arms spring from its summit: the nearest town to which these point is, according to the inscription, distant ten miles; the farthest above twenty. From the well-known names of these towns I learn in what country I have lighted; a north-midland shire, dusk with moorland, ridged with mountain.”

Now in the coaching days of Charlotte’s youth the old east-west road from Sheffield to Manchester crossed the north-south road from Yorkshire into Derbyshire at a point on the Derbyshire border, high on the Hallam moors, about ten miles from Sheffield; and at the junction stood a stone pillar, known as Moscar Cross, often whitewashed to make it visible in the darkness. These old roads are but cart tracks now or completely buried beneath heather and bilberry, because a new Sheffield-Manchester road has been laid on lower ground a few miles to the south of them; but Moscar Cross is assuredly the Whitcross around which Jane wandered for two days and nights; and for those who have a fancy to go and search out this lost crossroads among the heather and moss, let me quote a letter from Mr. J. P. Lamb, the City Librarian of Sheffield, who most kindly put some

researches in hand for me. "All traces of the Moscar Cross have disappeared. Its location, however, is easily verified by reference to early maps and field books. From these it is clear that the road junction on which the cross stood was situated about a third of a mile west of the present Moscar Cross (which is the name of a house) shown on current maps."

Jane, after a night in the heather, walked along a road which is almost certainly the old moorland track under Stanage Edge. She went on and on and, when exhausted, sat on a stone. And as she sat there she heard a church bell chime. "I turned in the direction of the sound, and there, amongst the romantic hills, whose changes and aspect I had ceased to note an hour ago, I saw a hamlet and a spire. All the valley at my right hand was full of pasture-fields, and corn-fields, and wood; and a glittering stream ran zig-zag through the varying shades of green."

This is Hathersage, with its steep fields falling down to its octagonal spire, and the Derwent winding along the bottom; Hathersage where Charlotte had stayed with Ellen Nussey at the vicarage to prepare it for Henry Nussey and his bride; Hathersage on its tilted streets beneath the sage-green heather and the old-gold bracken and the purple crests of rock.

Like Jane I went down into the village—Morton as she calls it; and I entered the spired church, and there on the north side of its sanctuary was a great stone and marble tomb with a Latin inscription on the brass on its top. Translated, the inscription reads, "Here lies Robert Eyre, knight, who died on the 21st day of March, A.D. 1459, and of Joan, his wife, who died on the 9th day of March, 1463, and their children, on whose souls may God have mercy, Amen." Hathersage is in the heart of the Eyre country.

Like Jane I called at the vicarage, and, unlike Jane, I was welcomed in and given food and drink. The vicar (Henry Nussey's successor) and his wife showed me the "Charlotte Brontë Room" in which she is supposed to have slept when staying with Ellen. On the mantelpiece was her picture and a framed poem which the memory-haunted room had inspired in the breast of a visitor: "I will not fail to fall on sleep, Kind shade who, silent, wanderest here."

Jane, finding (unlike me) no help in the village, struggled

like a night-moth towards a light in the high marshes. You will not need me to remind you that this shone from Moor House, through whose kitchen window she peeped and saw Diana and Mary Rivers seated by the fire with Hannah their old servant—or, shall we say, saw, most strangely, the kitchen of Haworth parsonage with Emily and Anne and old Tabby seated in the glow of a peat fire.

Two houses on the hills above Hathersage dispute for the honour of being Moor House. One is North Lees, and its distance from the village and its place amid wild scenery are the arguments of its plea; the other is Moorseats lower down on the pastures. I am disposed to pronounce Solomon's judgment and split the baby between them, allowing that North Lees occupies the site of Moor House, and that Moorseats is the house itself.

There is enough in Moorseats to satisfy me that Charlotte was thinking of it when she described Jane's arrival on the kitchen-threshold of Moor House. I climbed to it on a late autumn day, over the wet pastures, brilliantly green, and up through a wood of beeches whose silver trunks rose from a floor of copper and russet leaves. At the top, above the wood, I found a wall, a wicket, and a garden "dark with yew and holly", just as Charlotte sets forth; and the lady of the old, grey, crumbling house, taking me in, shewed me, within a wing that is later than Charlotte's time, a little window that looked straight into the old kitchen. Beneath it was the threshold-step on which Jane is reputed to have sunk in the dark night and where that extraordinary mortal, St. John Rivers (Henry Nussey?), found her weeping and wringing her hands. "Young woman, rise, and pass before me into the house."

Lastly, when Jane heard the mysterious voice of her Master calling her across the shires, "Jane! Jane! Jane!" she ran from Moor House to find him and learned that he was at the manor house of Ferndean. Ferndean Manor, all appear to agree, is Wycoller Hall just inside the Lancashire border, about seven miles from Haworth. Wycoller is a tiny hamlet cradled in a deep dene among the moors; a string of old grey cottages and barns, silent among its enclosing trees, except for the beck that prattles under its many bridges, and (when I was there) a dairyman

singing in a cow-house. The Hall is a heaped and fanged ruin among the tall trees. To get to it I left the Haworth-Colne road almost at the summit of its arc over the Combe Hill Moors, and, passing through a gate on the southern side, went down and down a green-ribbon track through a leaving desolation of fawny moor-grass, tarnished heather, and bracken that was bronzed and sorrel-red with autumn. In Emily's phrase I "divided the desolation" with a few blown trees and a single curled and frightened sheep. A beck ran down with me like a friendly dog, now wandering away to visit some rushes and rocks, now coming close to heel again. Down and down we went till we reached, as it were, the timber line and were among abundant trees, all red and ochre and crimson, in a steep, dropping lane. The beck leapt the rocks in eager and creaming falls but kept close to me in this quiet and desolate way.

And so we came to the grey-green ruin, with the sycamores shadowing its gaunt walls and the nettles encumbering its feet. Two tall thorns guarded its narrow doorway, where, we may suppose, Jane first saw the blinded Rochester stepping out into his garden. "Yes: life of some kind there was; for I heard a movement—that narrow front door was unclosing, and some shape was about to issue from the grange. It opened slowly; a figure came out into the twilight and stood on the step; a man without a hat: he stretched forth his hand to feel whether it rained. Dusk as it was, I had recognised him—it was my master. . . ."

I passed through that empty doorway into the main chamber, now open to the sky. A sycamore grew out of its chimney wall; and the nettles, grasses, and sycamore weeds, knee-high and breast-high, crowded together, the latest company in that handsome salon. I looked at the magnificent fireplace with its mossy and broken chimney-seats and remembered Jane bringing a tray of candles and water to the blind tenant of the room as he "supported his head against the high, old-fashioned mantelpiece".

"This is you, Mary, is it not?"

"Mary is in the kitchen," I answered.

"He put out his hand with a quick gesture, but, not seeing where I stood, he did not touch me. 'Who is this? Who is this?' he demanded, trying, as it seemed, to *see* with those sightless eyes. . . .

“ ‘Will you have a little more water, sir? I spilt half of what was in the glass,’ I said.

“ ‘Who is it? What is it? Who speaks?’

“ ‘Pilot knows me, and John and Mary know I am here. I came only this evening,’ I answered.

“ ‘Great God!—what delusion has come over me? What sweet madness has seized me?’

“ ‘No delusion—no madness: your mind, sir, is too strong for delusion, your health too sound for frenzy.’

“ ‘And where is the speaker? Is it only a voice? Oh, I *cannot* see, but I must feel, or my heart will stop and my brain burst. Whatever—whoever you are—be perceptible to the touch or I cannot live!’

“ ‘He groped: I arrested his wandering hand, and prisoned it in both mine.

“ ‘Her very fingers! he cried. ‘Her small, slight fingers! If so, there must be more of her.’

“ ‘The muscular hand broke from my custody; my arm was seized, my shoulder—neck—waist—I was entwined and gathered to him.

“ ‘Is it Jane? What is it? This is her shape—this is her size—’

“ ‘And this her voice,’ I added: ‘She is all here: her heart too. God bless you, sir! I am glad to be so near you again.’ ”

CHAPTER NINETEEN

CHARLOTTE, who was so largely tied in her novels to her own experience and the places she had known, is far easier to track than Emily who, in *Wuthering Heights*, is as elusive as ever. We have traced Emily to the main gateway of High Sunderland Hall, but the hills around that antique pile are not the wild moors of *Wuthering Heights*. So much as she wanted of the grotesque house she took with her to her own mountains. There is but one other place which we can feel certain figures in her novel; and that is Ponden Kirk some five miles west of Haworth.

If you make your way, either from boulder to boulder along the stream, or round the haunches of the hills, to the head of Ponden Clough you will find that its ultimate wall is an almost precipitous slope mantled in bracken. And up on the ridge, projecting like a giant dormer from the moor-roof and the mantling bracken, you will see a squared black mass of gritstone cliff with a passage like a dark and narrow cave running through it, beneath the weight of rock. This is Ponden Kirk with its legend that if a maid can thread herself through that tunnel from daylight to daylight she will marry before the year's end, but if she takes fright and turns back she will lose her chance of love for ever. You climb by a rock stairway to the ridge and crossing a few yards of its spongy heather and wet, black peat, reach the roof of the Kirk, a platform of inky stone partly overlaid with rags of heather, ling, and moss. Stand there in the wind, and before you, and beneath you, is the deep gash of Ponden Clough with its beck fussing round the boulders towards Ponden village and the homes of men; behind you is the wilderness. It is a high wilderness of brooding moor, its heather cut into a hundred islands by the rivulets which have channelled the easy peat; its rocks and boulders scattered meaninglessly over the waste; and its distances drained of all sound except, perhaps, the rumour of running water and the cry of a curlew. It is the home of the curlew and the grouse; and the whimbrel's house-of-call.

Ponden Kirk is Peniston Crag, where Cathy and Heathcliff played as children, and its tunnel is the "fairy cave" where Cathy on her bed of delirium imagined she was lying. "I see in you, Nelly, an aged woman: you have grey hair and bent shoulders. This bed is the fairy cave under Peniston Crag, and you are gathering elf-bolts to hurt our heifers." You can be certain that Emily stood where you are standing now, her eyes on the untamed wastes, the wind in her skirts and her hair, and Keeper prowling between the ling, the moss-hags, and the standing pools.

This strange cliff among the heather is the very essence of *Wuthering Heights*; it is the very symbol of Heathcliff himself; as Charlotte, I am sure, perceived when she wrote: "The statuary found a granite block on a solitary moor; gazing thereon, he saw how from the crag might be elicited a head, savage, swart, sinister: a form moulded with at least one element of grandeur—power. . . . With time and labour the crag took human shape; and there it stands, colossal, dark, and frowning, half statue, half rock; in the former case terrible and goblin-like; in the latter, almost beautiful, for its colouring is of mellow grey, and moorland moss clothes it; and heath with its blooming bells and balmy fragrance grows faithfully close to the giant's foot." And as Emily meant, when she made Cathy say: "My love for Linton is like the foliage in the woods; time will change it, I'm well aware, as winter changes the trees. My love for Heathcliffe resembles the eternal rocks beneath: a source of little visible delight, but necessary."

And there is a good reason why Emily should be powerfully drawn to the old rock and the Crow Hill waste behind it. As a child of six she had heard, maybe with fear but more probably with excitement, the distant roar when, on the laps of Crow Hill, the earth mutinied and uprose; and the whole bog, bringing the roar with it, came sliding down the clough. She was near at hand and may have seen the bog advancing towards her.

It was the 2nd September, 1824, and early evening; and Emily was walking out with Branwell, aged seven, Anne, aged four and a half, and their nurses, Nancy and Sarah Garrs. They had reached the neighbourhood of the clough—probably near Ponden Village—when a storm broke in thunder, lightning, and

sheeting rain, and soon there was a tremor in the earth, and then this sudden unnatural explosion in the distance. The waters pent in the belly of Crow Hill had been unable, after weeks of storm and rain, to bear any more; and the great hill, after a terrible gestation and labour, had heaved with a life of its own and delivered itself of the intolerable bog, which, bursting its confining walls, rolled down the valley, a mass of mud, water, boulders, uprooted vegetation, and broken trees. "It moved slowly," Mr. Halliwell Sutcliffe wrote fifty years ago, in his *By Moor and Fell*; "its solid, oncoming front was black and sticky: a man had time to count his sins thrice over whilst the monster crept stealthily toward him. There are those about the moorside who remember seeing the spectacle; and they say that it seemed as if the whole moor top were turning over on its side and rolling downward."

The prodigious event so excited Mr. Brontë that he preached a sermon about it in Haworth Church two Sundays later; and not only preached it but printed it—had not the unruly business happened within the jurisdiction of his chapelry? For text he took: "His lightnings enlightened the world; the earth saw and trembled. The hills melted like wax at the presence of the Lord"; and from his three-decker pulpit he told the people in their high pews:

"I would avail myself of the advantages now offered for moral and religious improvement by the late earthquake and extraordinary eruption which took place lately about four miles from this very church in which we are now assembled. You all know that on the second day of this month of September in this present year of our Lord, one thousand, eight hundred and twenty-four"—how he loved a little pomposity!—"at about six o'clock in the afternoon, two portions of the moors in the neighbourhood sank several yards during a heavy storm of thunder, lightning and rain, and there issued forth a mighty volume of mud and water which spread alarm, astonishment and danger along its course of many miles. Previous to the issuing forth of this flood, as I have learnt from someone who resides near the place, there was a very considerable tremor of the neighbouring parts, and I was able myself to perceive something of the kind, though at a distance of four miles. This circumstance requires some

explanation which I will give you in a few words. As the day was exceedingly fine I had sent my little children who were indisposed, accompanied by the servants, to take an airing on the common, and as they stayed out rather longer than I expected I went to an upper chamber to look for their return. The heavens over the moors were blackening fast. I heard the muttering of distant thunder and saw the frequent flashing of the lightning, though ten minutes before there was scarcely a breath of air stirring. The gale freshened rapidly and carried along with it clouds of dust and stubble; and by this time some large drops of rain clearly announced an approaching heavy shower. My little family had escaped to a place of safety, but I did not know it. I consequently watched every movement of the coming tempest with a painful degree of interest. The house was perfectly still. Under these circumstances I heard a deep, distant explosion, something resembling and yet something differing from thunder. I perceived a gentle tremor in the chamber in which I was standing and in the glass of the window just before me. . . . This shaking and opening of the earth, and eruption of mud and water, was preceded by a profound calm, and accompanied by a very high wind and much lightning and thunder; and both before and after the air was strongly electrified, as was manifest from the sultry heat, the frequent and vivid lightning and loud thunder, and the apparent mingling of the clouds, and their copper-coloured and hazy, lurid gloom——”

Let us break in to observe the narrative skill of the parent and first inspirer of the Brontës; and his exultation in the telling of a story. That he was proud of his narration we can be sure, since he published it.

“The operating cause must have been very powerful, as two cavities were formed, one of which was not less than four or five yards deep in places, and a rapid torrent of mud and water issued forth, varying from twenty to thirty yards in width and from four to five in depth, which in its course for six or seven miles entirely threw down and made breaches in several stone and wooden bridges, uprooted trees, laid prostrate walls and gave many other awful proofs that in the hand of Omnipotence it was an irresistible instrument to execute His Judgment——”

But here he ceases to be the teller of a fine tale and becomes

the professional divine improving the occasion ; and we may slip from our pew before the sermon ends. And home from church we may amuse ourselves with an old copy of the *Leeds Mercury* where the editor, enjoying himself as much as Mr. Brontë, has written his own long description of the phenomenon ; a prose piece of which he thought sufficiently well to reprint it later as a broadside ; and in this it is of some interest to read, "The torrent was seen coming down the glen before it reached the hamlet by a person who gave the alarm and thereby saved the lives of several children, who would otherwise have been swept away."

Not content with a sermon, Mr. Brontë in his excitement wrote a poem from which I quote :

As onward rolls the dark resistless tide,
Pale trembling mortals flew on either side ;
And while the torrent swept a narrow vale
Misgiving mortals shook with horror pale.

Clearly the Crow Hill bog-burst was a family story among the Brontës, and there was every reason why Emily in after years should be fascinated by Ponden Clough where she could see—as you may today—in the boulders along the glen, the traces of that old catastrophe. Secure, then, in our identification of Ponden Kirk with Peniston Crag, we have a mid-point on which to hang the wild moors of *Wuthering Heights*. We have found the desolation we can divide with Emily.

Everyone in Haworth will tell you that Top Withens, a ruined farmhouse breasting the tumults on Withens Height, just under the 1400 contour line, is the original of *Wuthering Heights*, the home of the Earnshaws, and that Ponden Hall, at the foot of Ponden Beck, is Thrushcross Grange, the home of the Lintons: but there is hardly a sentence in Emily's descriptions that does not make nonsense of both these claims. *Wuthering Heights* in the book is a gabled house of some pretensions with a "huge" living apartment, deep cellars, high garrets, and many stairways and passages, to say nothing of its stables and horses and its "tenants and labourers". Top Withens is but a humble Yorkshire farmstead, a natural descendant of the old winterhouse

of the Norse and Danish settlers ; which is to say that it comprises, in line abreast, its small living-room, barn, and cattle-house ; or, as they would call them in these parts, housebody, laithe, and mistal.

Similarly Thrushcross Grange in the book is a mansion with timbered park, park gates, porter's lodge, coachhouse and accommodation for a number of coachmen, grooms, and servants. Ponden Hall is but a long, low "gentleman's residence" with a narrow garden in front and some farm buildings at its side. The poultry cluck about its outhouses, and the sheep bleat in a fold beneath its walls. Opposite its long façade, across a narrow bridle-road, is Old Ponden Hall, the small seventeenth-century house which sired the larger residence across the way. Of date 1634, Old Ponden is now, like Wyoller Hall, a ruin among high nettles and sprouting sycamores ; and an ancient Spanish chestnut stands locked in battle with it, the tree's massive arms forcing it slowly, roof and walls, to the ground. Roof and walls were intact in Emily's day, but this grim quarrel between the earth's stubborn will and man's presumption must have already begun, if we may judge from the stoutness of the tree's avenging arms ; and it must have held her eyes and stirred the depths of her, when she came on a visit to the Heatons at Ponden Hall.

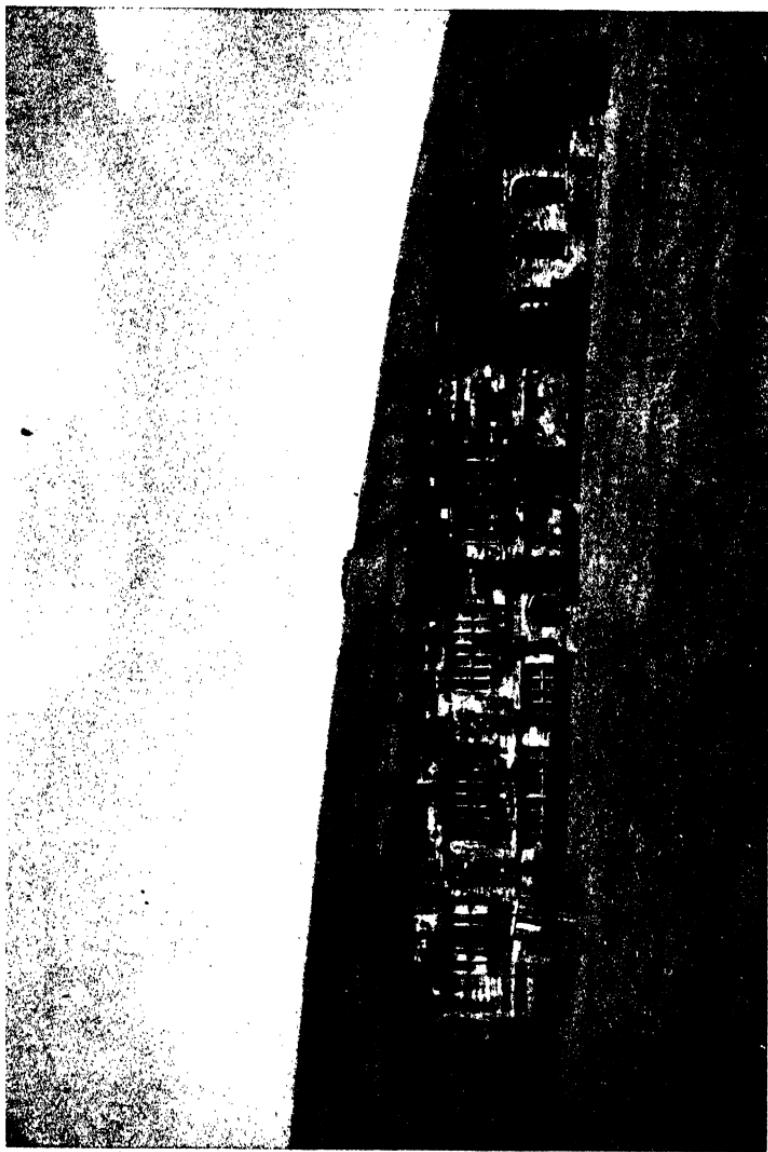
Though neither Top Withens nor Ponden Hall will answer to the descriptions of Wuthering Heights and Thrushcross Grange, the *site* of Top Withens may well be the site of the Earnshaws' storm-swept and star-cursed home. Many a time as I wandered over Stanbury or Haworth Moors I have seen the mists on the heights part for a moment and uncover the grey silhouette of Top Withens so that it looked like a house on a slope of cloud ; then fall together and hide it again ; and I have felt sure that Emily must often have caught her breath at the same melodramatic unveiling and fixed her imagination on that exalted and lonely home. Up to its station, "exposed to an atmosphere of tumult in stormy weather" she carried, I suggest, something of High Sunderland Hall, something of Law Hill, and something of Ponden Hall—to wit the inscription and date over its door—and there built, with these materials and others which we cannot now find, a house of her own which she called after



Ponden Kirk



Old Ponden Hall



High Sunderland Hall

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Withens Height by the name of Wuthering Heights. And about it she wrote a book which has none of the striving after grandiloquence which we meet, with sigh, in *Shirley* and *Villette* but is as natural in its movement, and as easy and simple in its style, however wild the winds that blow through it, as her own unhesitating stride with Keeper over the morose, inhuman moors.

CHAPTER TWENTY

IN the latter half of 1846 *Wuthering Heights* and *Agnes Grey* were accepted for publication. A Mr. T. C. Newby, of Mortimer Street, Cavendish Square, accepted them (in another of Charlotte's acid phrases) "on terms somewhat impoverishing to the two authors". The actual terms were a payment of £50 by the two authors for an edition of 350 copies, the two novels to be published together in the customary three volumes. Emily's novel and Anne's had found hospitality of a kind; but not *The Professor*. What were Charlotte's feelings? Her loyalty directed her to rejoice with her sisters, but her heart was sick. "Currer Bell's book," she tells us, "found acceptance nowhere, nor any acknowledgment of merit, so that something like the chill of despair began to invade his heart." She went back to the writing of *Jane Eyre*, and perhaps, because her work was unwanted, wrote it with a new passion. The grapes had been crushed in the wine-press again, and their blood stained the page.

As for *The Professor*, as fast as one publisher returned it, she sent it to another. Six times she repacked it and sent it forth again.

On the 15th July, in 1847, it came home as usual, and she scored out the last publisher's address and wrote in its place "Messrs. Smith and Elder, 65 Cornhill, London." This letter accompanied the parcel:

"GENTLEMEN—I beg to submit to your consideration the accompanying manuscript. I should be glad to learn whether it is such as you approve, and would undertake to publish at as early a period as is possible. Address, Mr. CURRER BELL, under cover to Miss Brontë, Haworth, Bradford, Yorkshire."

Sixteen days passed in silence—only sixteen, which are as nothing in a publisher's office—but, with the impatience of the inexperienced author, she wrote again.

"GENTLEMEN—About three weeks since I sent for your consideration a MS. entitled '*The Professor*, a tale by Currer Bell'. I should be glad to know whether it reached your hands safely, and likewise to learn, at your earliest convenience, whether it be

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such as you can undertake to publish.—I am, Gentlemen, yours respectfully, CURRER BELL.

“I enclose a directed cover for your reply.”

This time the reply came promptly, and Charlotte, opening it, as she has told us, with trembling hands, was surprised to uncover a letter of two pages. “It declined, indeed, to publish that tale, for business reasons, but it discussed its merits and demerits so courteously . . . that this very refusal cheered the author better than a vulgarly expressed acceptance would have done. It was added that a work in three volumes would meet with careful attention.”

Immediately, and doubtless with hands still trembling, Charlotte wrote an answer.

“Your objection to the want of varied interest in the tale is, I am aware, not without grounds; yet it appears to me that it might be published without serious risk, if its appearance were speedily followed up by another work from the same pen, of a more striking and exciting character. The first work might serve as an introduction, and accustom the public to the author’s name; the success of the second might therefore be rendered more probable. I have a second narrative in three volumes, now in progress, and nearly completed, to which I have endeavoured to impart a more vivid interest than belongs to *The Professor*. In about a month I hope to finish it, so that if a publisher were found for *The Professor*, the second narrative might follow as soon as was deemed advisable; and thus the interest of the public (if any interest was aroused) might not be suffered to cool. Would you be kind enough to favour me with your judgment on this plan?”

In other words, why not publish an unsatisfactory book first so as to win a public for a more exciting one?

Messrs. Smith and Elder did not take to this plan, and eighteen days later Charlotte wrote to them again. “To Messrs. Smith and Elder, August 24th, I now send you per rail a MS entitled *Jane Eyre*, a novel in three volumes, by Currer Bell.”

The manuscript arrived at 65 Cornhill, and was given to the firm’s chief reader, Mr. William Smith Williams, to carry home for his consideration. Mr. Williams, having begun to read it, could not lay it aside. When he had finished it he reported on it

to Mr. George Smith, the youthful head of the firm, in such terms that the young man laughed, was inclined to doubt such extraordinary encomiums, and sought a second opinion. He gave it to a shrewd, tough Scotsman, Mr. James Taylor, who could be trusted to keep canny. Mr. Taylor took it home and sat up with it half the night. He admitted this to Mr. Smith, and the young man, impressed by a second witness, took the manuscript home, as the heads of publishing houses do, "to read during the weekend".

At that time Mr. George Smith was living with his mother, a widow, his two sisters, and his young brother, at No. 4 Westbourne Place, Paddington. Westbourne Place was then a new, quiet, and almost fashionable terrace in a new world of stucco terraces and sedate gardens, built near the terminus of the new Great Western Railway. You can roam among those terraces today and, gazing at their pilasters and pediments, their cornices and balustrades, meditate on the dignity and comfort that has fallen from them. Mr. George Smith's study was the back room on the ground floor; his dining-room the front room on the ground floor; his drawing-room a large chamber above. Charlotte described the house later as "a splendid house" and the drawing-room as "very grand". On the Sunday morning Mr. Smith (he wrote the whole story fifty years later) shut the door of his study on himself and began the manuscript of *Jane Eyre*. "There was no possibility of taking a walk that day. We had been wandering, indeed, in the leafless shrubbery. . . ." He refused his lunch, asking only for a sandwich and a glass of wine; he refused his tea impatiently; and it was only with difficulty that his mother and sisters persuaded him to come to dinner. He finished the book before bedtime; and next morning wrote to Mr. Currer Bell.

Westbourne Place is now a grey row of shops and tenements, cut off and dwarfed by the huge, new red-brick façade of the G.W.R. Parcels Receiving Office. No. 4 Westbourne Place is now No. 26 Bishop's Bridge Road, and a grocer's shop. On its right is a secondhand furniture dealer's and on the left a war-damaged shop, barricaded and empty. The room at the back, which was Mr. Smith's study, is the shop's parlour; once upon a time, as you can still see from an inscription on its glass door, it was a shaving-saloon and without knowing it you could sit

and be shaved where Mr. Smith sat and read the manuscript of *Jane Eyre*. The dining-room is now the grocer's shop; and in the place where Charlotte and Anne were entertained; where Charlotte first dined with Thackeray; where she shocked a dinner table by honestly saying what she thought of Macready and Elizabeth Barrett Browning; where Mr. Smith, like a good publisher, sat five critics down to dine with her, here the manageress of the grocery serves her customers as they come in with their shopping-bags from the streets and terraces whose day has passed.

So it is, and no one in Paddington knows it.

There is no doubt about it. The Librarian of Paddington, Mr. H. J. W. Wilson, was good enough to verify it for me. Some hours spent by one of his assistants in the strong room at the Town Hall enabled her to produce this information from the old rate books:

“*Oct. 1848 and Oct. 1849.* 4, Westbourne Place. George Smith is entered as the ratepayer.

“*April 1871.* Under an order of the then local authority the name Westbourne Place was changed to Bishop's Road and No. 4 in the former became No. 26 in the latter.

“*April 1938.* The name Bishop's Road was changed to Bishop's Bridge Road under an order of the L.C.C. but there was no change in street number.”

“My hour of torment was the post hour,” Charlotte wrote once; but on an August or early September day in this year, old James Feather, the Haworth postman, delivered a letter at the parsonage door; and no doubt Charlotte, who had been waiting for days in suspense, recognised from the franking what it was. Certainly she opened it trembling. She read in it—and it is almost as fine a thing for me to write as it was for her to read—an offer from the head of Messrs. Smith and Elder to buy her book for five hundred pounds.

Not fifty pounds from author to publisher, but five hundred pounds from publisher to author.

Let us leave that good moment there; for it was only the beginning. The book was out—published—in little more than a month, and even in those days this suggests an immense enthusiasm in the publisher. October 16th, 1847, was the day on

which *Jane Eyre* broke upon the world; and soon the world was in the same case as Mr. Williams, Mr. Taylor, and Mr. Smith. It was sitting up half the night or all the day; it was refusing its meals in its anxiety to see the little outcast governess make a marriage of it with her Master. The literary and the unliterary were reading it; the famous and the unknown; "Mr. Thackeray, Sir John Herschel, Mr. Fonblanque, Leigh Hunt and Mr. Lewes" as well as the nameless; the fashionable and the unfashionable; the delighted and the shocked; the metropolitan and the provincial—they were even reading it in Keighley and Haworth. Mr. T. C. Newby woke up to what was happening. After a year's sleep he announced the immediate publication of *Wuthering Heights* and *Agnes Grey*. The citadel had fallen. You might almost say in your pleasure and excitement that it was in flames.

We are at the top of the curve. This is the best hour that the Brontës will know; and it is a very good one. Charlotte, her heart shaken with success, could look out of the living-room window towards the world beyond the hills and think that, from this remote and narrow headquarters, she had conquered it in the end for herself and her family.

Emily and Anne were excited too, and insisted that she must tell their father all about it. It would make him so happy. You may remember that Mr. Brontë was left alone in his darkened room when Charlotte began to write *Jane Eyre*; and this is a parable. He was left in the dark all through. He knew nothing about the book of poems, its publication and failure; nothing about the writing of *Wuthering Heights*, *Agnes Grey*, and *The Professor*, and the acceptance of the first two; nothing about the publication of *Jane Eyre* and its reception in the world. There is a conflict of evidence as to whether Branwell was ever told of these things. Charlotte says that he wasn't. We know that she could be spectacularly incorrect in her statements about the family; but this surely is a matter in which she could not err.

Not averse from complying with her sisters' request, Charlotte, her three volumes and some of the reviews in her hands, went one afternoon into her father's study and began, "Papa, I've been writing a book." We have her exact words because Mrs. Gaskell

wrote them down when she heard of them from Charlotte—why? She did not know then that she would be asked to write Charlotte's Life. Did she think that here was a fine scene for a novel?

“Papa, I've been writing a book.”

“Have you, my dear?”

“Yes; and I want you to read it.”

“I am afraid it will try my eyes too much.”

“But it is not in manuscript; it is printed.”

“My dear! You've never thought of the expense it will be!

It will be almost sure to be a loss, for how can you get a book sold? No one knows you or your name.”

“But, papa, I don't think it will be a loss; if you will just let me read a review or two, and tell you more about it.”

And she read the reviews to him, and left *Jane Eyre* in his hand for him to read. I often go into that little stone-flagged study and think of this grand moment of Charlotte's. And this grand moment for Mr. Brontë too. He sat himself down to the three volumes. Yes, he could read print now; the operation in Manchester had been a remarkable success. He could walk unaided to his pulpit now, so that the people wondered and talked about a miracle. At tea-time Mr. Brontë crossed the stone passage from study to living-room. “Girls,” he said, “do you know that Charlotte has been writing a book, and it is much better than likely?”

Did they *know*! And “much better than likely”! How exactly the comment of one member of a family upon the work of another.

But what a family triumph—the father and the three sisters at the tea-table! The year 1847 closes in the triumph of the Brontës, just as the year about to break goes down upon their tragedy.

CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE

“WITH best wishes for the whole house till 1848. . . .” “I wonder how we shall all be and where and how situated on the thirtieth of July, 1848, when if we are all alive, Emily will be just 30, I shall be in my 29th year, Charlotte in her 33rd, and Branwell in his 32nd; and what changes shall we have seen and known; and shall we be much changed ourselves?” So Anne concluded her secret birthday paper in 1845. And Emily likewise: “With best wishes to the whole house till 1848, July 30th, and as much longer as may be.”

Well, in the early months of 1848 Anne was completing *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*, partly using Branwell as a model for the degenerate and lost Huntingdon; Charlotte was writing the first part of *Shirley*, using Emily as the model for the idealised heroine; and Emily, apparently, was writing nothing but a few poems. *Jane Eyre* was in its third edition and enjoying an immense success in America. Long, friendly, discursive letters from Mr. Williams, the chief reader of Messrs. Smith, Elder and Co., were arriving at the parsonage for Mr. Currer Bell, and Mr. Currer Bell, his identity and sex still undisclosed, was sending long, well-phrased, and often brilliant letters in reply. Newspapers and journals arrived from Messrs. Smith, Elder and Co., whenever they contained a review of *Jane Eyre*; and ever and anon a large parcel of new books from the same genial and generous house.

Mr. T. C. Newby, well awake now, and delighted to perceive that the fields were white for a harvest, had written to Emily or Anne announcing his readiness to publish a new novel—the letter can be seen in the Museum lying on Emily’s desk but there is nothing to indicate whether it was addressed to Ellis or Acton Bell. Anne sent him *The Tenant*, and Mr. Newby, delaying not at all, lest the fine weather broke, published it in June. Anne received £25 on the day of publication, and the promise of another £25 as soon as 250 copies had been sold. In fact, Mr. Newby was so wide awake that he sold *The Tenant* to an American publisher as the new novel by the author of *Jane Eyre*, assuring him that to the best of his belief Currer, Ellis, and Acton Bell

were one and the same person. The American publisher advertised *The Tenant* as Currer Bell's new novel, whereupon the American publisher of *Jane Eyre*, who had paid a high price for the sheets of the next Currer Bell novel, wrote to Messrs. Smith, Elder and Co., in what terms I know not, but the purport of his letter was certainly "What the hell . . . ?" Mr. George Smith, of Smith, Elder and Co., immediately wrote to Mr. Currer Bell asking in courteous but unmistakable terms for some enlightenment.

Only a cat in a hen-coop could stir such a flutter and beating of wings as this letter stirred in the parsonage. Charlotte, whose nature was ever to fear the worst, apprehended disaster. Her happy relations with her publishers were threatened; her honour was being doubted; they were suspecting Currer Bell of smart malpractice and double-dealing. How complete was her panic we can see from the fact that, despite her dread of strangers, despite the shyness that could split her head and upset her stomach, despite her resolute wish to conceal her identity and sex, she and Anne decided to go that very day to London and reveal themselves to Mr. Smith as two separate persons. Her anger at Mr. Newby's trick, and her fear for her good name, and Anne's good name, and the family's good name, were stronger than her social timidity; she could know no peace of mind, she could not rest or keep still, until she was on her way to London. She and Anne hurried over a few household tasks; packed a small box with a change of clothes—was it the small trunk lined with the leaves of *Delicate Investigation*?—put it on a cart that was leaving for Keighley; and themselves a little later walked the four miles to Keighley through an appropriate thunderstorm. At Keighley they just caught the train for Leeds; and from Leeds they travelled in the night train to London.

Knowing nowhere else to go, when they arrived in London at about eight in the morning, they went to the Chapter Coffee House in Paternoster Row to which their father had taken Charlotte and Emily when escorting them from Haworth to Brussels. Here they refreshed themselves with a wash, some breakfast, and a brief rest; and then set out in their bonnets and black dresses to find No. 65 Cornhill. It was a Saturday morning, and perhaps it is not frivolous to state that this writer has always

been surprised that Charlotte should have expected the head of a publishing house to be in his office on a Saturday, and even more surprised that she actually did find him there at about ten o'clock in the morning. But perhaps things were different in those days.

They had only to walk along Cheapside and Poultry to reach Cornhill, but what with the dangerous crossing at St. Martins-le-Grand, where five roads met, and the difficult junction of Cheapside and Poultry with King Street and Queen Street, and the terrible circus opposite the Bank, on to which no less than seven roads emptied their carriages, waggons, and horsemen; and what with Charlotte's fear of the larger animals, it took them almost an hour to get from their hotel to the publisher's door.

Thus it was that the G.O.C. of the Brontë campaign, from her headquarters in Haworth, marched through the conquered capital.

They entered 65 Cornhill. Frightened, I suppose, they did not give their names, but asked to be shewn up to Mr. Smith. And after only a short delay, in this extraordinary house, they were led to his room. A tall, dark and astonishingly young man rose to greet them. Mr. George Smith was a gay, laughing, generous youth, whose high spirits and hearty affability remind us of Willy Weightman; he was exactly the same age at this time as Willy Weightman when that lively lad first came to Haworth. He was twenty-three. I cannot doubt that as he rose to meet these two slight, nervous, apprehensive ladies in their provincial black, one of whom was so small as to be almost dwarfish, he was wondering who in pity they might be, what on earth they wanted of him, and how quickly he could get rid of them.

Charlotte, scarcely knowing what to do or say in her agitation, handed to him his own letter which had so shaken the parsonage on the previous day. He looked at it, recognised it, and asked in surprise, "But where did you get this?"

"I am Currer Bell," the tiny little woman answered him.

Such moments of self-disclosure and astonished recognition are frequent in Greek Drama—indeed under the term *anagnorisis*, or recognition, they became almost as necessary a part of the

dénouement as the *peripeteia*, or downfall; but I can think of no scene in the Brontë novels to match this one.

Charlotte explained further to the amazed young man, "We are three sisters," and had no sooner spoken the words than she regretted them. She had inadvertently betrayed the author of *Wuthering Heights*. "Ellis Bell will not endure to be alluded to under any other appellation than the *nom-de-plume*," she wrote to Mr. Williams when she got back to Haworth. "I committed a grand error in betraying his identity to you and Mr. Smith. It was inadvertent—the words 'We are three sisters' escaped me before I was aware. I regretted the avowal the moment I had made it. I regret it bitterly now." Mr. Smith, when he was recovered, abounded in excitement, high spirits, enthusiasm, and offers of entertainment; reminding us more than ever of Willy Weightman. He fetched in Mr. Williams, the chief reader, "a pale, mild, stooping man", and presented him to his own "discovery", the author of *Jane Eyre*. He smiled as the surprised little man shook hands with Charlotte and Anne. He declared that he must have a party for them. They must meet some of the literary celebrities of London. He must introduce the literary critics to them. It was always a good thing to make friends of the critics. They must leave the Chapter Coffee House and stay with his mother and sisters. What would they like to see while in town? The Royal Academy? The National Gallery? The opera? They must certainly go to the opera. This very night.

Charlotte, shaken, embarrassed, and racked with headache, but assuredly happy, declined the party and the invitation to stay in his home; expressed her doubt about going to the opera (which in Mr. Smith's view amounted to acceptance); and explained that she would like to go to church to hear Dr. Croly preach. Very well; Mr. Smith was ready for anything; even to take them to church.

And so, having shaken No. 65 Cornhill hardly less than yesterday's letter had shaken the parsonage, Charlotte and Anne returned to the Coffee House and, in Charlotte's case, to headache, sickness, and sal volatile. In the evening Mrs. Smith and her daughters arrived in full evening dress to take them to the opera; and Charlotte and Anne, not clear that they had accepted

Mr. Smith's invitation, left the window-seat where they had been sitting together and hurried upstairs to change into the only other dresses they had with them, which, in Mrs. Gaskell's words, were "high-made country garments". Mr. Williams was of the party at the opera, and Charlotte went up on his arm from the grand entrance to the lobby behind the first tier of boxes. He has recorded for us that as she gazed around upon the splendid vestibule, staircase, and salon, she slightly pressed his arm and whispered, "You know I am not accustomed to this sort of thing." In the gilded lobby, says Charlotte, "fine ladies and gentlemen glanced at us, as we stood by the box door, which was not yet opened, with a slight, graceful superciliousness, quite warranted by the circumstances. Still I felt pleasurable excitement in spite of headache, sickness, and conscious clownishness. The performance was Rossini's 'Barber of Seville'—very brilliant, though I fancy there are things I should like better. We got home after one o'clock."

The next day was Sunday. By this time, his first raptures over, Mr. Smith had delegated the task of taking them to church to his chief reader, Mr. Williams, and Mr. Williams accordingly took them to St. Stephen's Walbrook. In the afternoon Mr. Smith, now feeling rested, and his mother fetched them in a carriage to dine with them at their "splendid house" in Westbourne Place. And there in the dining-room on the ground floor Charlotte, no longer the disregarded governess, was fêted and toasted as the guest of honour. If only, as they sat there, they could have seen the ghosts of things to come: the canned groceries on the shelves, the assistants cutting bacon at the counter, and the tired shoppers coming in from the street.

On Monday they went to the Royal Academy and the National Gallery, and dined again in that room, afterwards taking tea with Mr. Williams and his family. And next day, Tuesday, "we left London, laden with books Mr. Smith had given us, and got safely home. A more jaded wretch than I looked it would be difficult to conceive. I was thin when I went, but I was meagre indeed when I returned, my face looking grey and very old, with strange, deep lines ploughed in it—my eyes stared unnaturally. I was weak and yet restless"—yes, but how happy, how full of a story to tell Mr. Brontë, Emily, old

Tabby and Martha Brown—John Brown's daughter, who was now Tabby's assistant. It is possible to be jaded with delight.

§

But that was the end of happiness. The Brontës' brief day of almost unclouded glory lasted from the summer of 1847 to this summer of 1848. "When I saw you and Mr. Smith in London, I little thought of all that was to come between July and Spring," wrote Charlotte to Mr. Williams when the darkness had fallen; "how my thoughts were to be caught away from imagination, enlisted and absorbed in realities the most cruel." Charlotte and Anne returned home on July 12th. On July 22nd (according to Francis Leyland; June 17th, according to the Oxford *Life and Letters*) Branwell wrote in a self-pitying letter to Leyland, the sculptor—just such a letter as some of us may have received from an acquaintance whose egotism, sane no longer, has gone hopelessly bad and turned into self-centred melancholia—of his "five months of utter sleeplessness, violent cough, and frightful agony of mind". "Long have I resolved," he says, "to write to you a letter of five or six pages, but intolerable mental wretchedness and corporeal weakness have utterly prevented me"; and he signs himself, "Yours sincerely, but nearly worn out, P. B. Brontë."

On July 28th Charlotte wrote to Ellen: "Branwell is the same in conduct as ever. His constitution seems much shattered. Papa, and sometimes all of us, have sad nights with him: he sleeps most of the day, and constantly will lie awake at night. But has not every house its trial? Write to me very soon, dear Nell. . . ." Some while back we read the celebrated letter, so full of gaiety, self-confidence, and a hearty conceit, which Branwell wrote to John Brown, the Master of his Lodge; the measure of his decay is seen in a letter he wrote now to the same old friend.

"Dear John—I shall feel very much obliged to you if you can contrive to get me Fivepence worth of Gin in a proper measure. Should it be speedily got I could perhaps take it from you or Billy at the lane top, or, what would be quite as well, sent out for, to you. I anxiously ask the favour because I know the

good it will do me. Punctually at Half-past Nine in the morning you will be paid the 5d. out of a shilling given to me then.—Yours, P.B.B."

Sometimes he fell down in a fit. At others he lay in bed, stupefied with opium or delirious with drink. His father nursed him. He had Branwell's bed placed in his own room, and often in the night, when the boy raved and was violent, Mr. Brontë wrestled with him, and soothed him, and got him to sleep again. Just as, twenty-seven years before, he had allowed no one else to nurse his dying wife during his long nights of pain, so now he kept his son at his side and watched over him. Many have pointed out that Emily was the child most like her father; and this is to say that Mr. Brontë was a little like Emily; and he was like her in being able to forgive, pity, and help his erring and degraded son. Did I say earlier that he knew nothing about Christianity? It was too harsh a statement. He knew something about it when he wrestled gently in the night, while the village of Haworth slept, with the boy he had loved best of all his children. "The poor old man and I have had a terrible night of it," Branwell would tell his sisters in the morning. "He does his best, poor old man." Aye, he did his best; and he never did better.

Summer waned into autumn; and none of them realised, neither the members of his family, nor his doctor, nor himself, that Branwell's hour was at hand. So Charlotte expressly says. "The past three weeks have been a dark interval in our humble home. Branwell's constitution has been failing fast all the summer; but still neither the doctor nor himself thought him so near the end as he was. He was entirely confined to his bed but for one single day, and was in the village two days before his death." And in another letter, "Till within half-an-hour of his decease he seemed unconscious of danger."

Of these last few days Francis Grundy tells an extraordinary story. Grundy was careless about dates and prone to picturesque or macabre exaggerations; but his tale fits in well enough with all that Charlotte, the servants, and the neighbours have recorded of Branwell's last few, tottering actions in this world; and we may accept some of it as true.

"I went to Haworth again to see him for the last time. From

the little inn I sent for him to the great, square, cold-looking Rectory. I had ordered a dinner for two, and the room looked cosy and warm, the bright glass and silver pleasantly reflecting the sparkling firelight, deeply toned by the red curtains. Whilst I waited his appearance, his father was shown in. Much of the Rector's old stiffness of manner was gone. He spoke of Branwell with more affection than I had ever heretofore heard him express, but he also spoke almost hopelessly. He said that when my message came Branwell was in bed, and had been almost too weak for the last few days to leave it; nevertheless, he had insisted upon coming, and would be there immediately. We parted, and I never saw him again.

"Presently the door opened cautiously, and a head appeared. It was a mass of red, unkempt, uncut hair, wildly floating round a great, gaunt forehead; the cheeks yellow and hollow, the mouth fallen, the thin white lips not trembling but shaking, the sunken eyes, once small, now glaring with the light of madness—all told the sad tale but too surely. I hastened to my friend, greeted him in the gayest manner, as I knew he best liked, drew him quickly into the room, and forced upon him a stiff glass of hot brandy. Under its influence, and that of the bright, cheerful surroundings, he looked frightened—frightened of himself. He glanced at me a moment, and muttered something about leaving a warm bed to come out into the cold night. Another glass of brandy, and returning warmth, gradually brought him back to something like the Brontë of old. He even ate some dinner, a thing which he said he had not done for long; so our last interview was pleasant, though grave. I never knew his intellect clearer. He described himself as waiting anxiously for death—indeed, longing for it, and happy, in these his sane moments, to think that it was so near. He once again declared that that death would be due to the story I knew, and to nothing else.

"When at last I was compelled to leave, he quietly drew from his coat sleeve a carving-knife, placed it on the table, and, holding me by both hands, said that, having given up all thoughts of ever seeing me again, he imagined when my message came that it was a call from Satan. Dressing himself, he took the knife, which he had long had secreted, and came to the inn,

with a full determination to rush into the room and stab the occupant. In the excited state of his mind he did not recognise me when he opened the door, but my voice and manner conquered him, and 'brought him home to himself', as he expressed it. I left him standing bareheaded in the road, with bowed form and dropping tears."

"He was in the village two days before his death," says Charlotte; and it was on this day that William Brown, the brother of John Brown, found him in the lane between the parsonage garden and the home of the Browns, "quite exhausted, panting for breath, and unable to proceed". He helped him up the lane and into his house.

On Sunday the 24th of September, just before nine in the morning, he lay in his bed in his father's room and his friend, John Brown, was with him. His manner, as he lay there, was wonderfully chastened and changed. He talked with John of the merry times they had had together at the old "Bull" and elsewhere, and he spoke with an unbounded affection of his father and sisters. He said not a word about the woman he had loved. He seemed to have forgotten her at last and to be able to think only of those within the walls of his childhood's home. He surprised John with the depth and tenderness of the affection he expressed for them. And presently he seized the hand of that Old Knaver of Trumps and cried, "Oh, John, I am dying"; and he turned away and murmured to himself, "In all my past life I have done nothing either great or good."

John saw, or suspected, that he was about to die, and called the family. And when they had all come, he, in his decency, slipped away. He did not go across the lane to his home but into the empty belfry of the church. Why? Maybe because it was Sunday morning and the bells would soon be ringing for Morning Prayer; maybe to toll a passing bell; but maybe for neither of these reasons, since it was still only nine o'clock; and he did not know how long his friend would live. Let us not intrude upon his retreat, but leave him there.

All the family were now around Branwell's bed; and it seems that Martha Brown was there too. The dying man's last agony had begun, and it went on for about twenty minutes. His father fell to his knees by the bed and prayed aloud, and

“No. 4
Westbourne
Place,
Paddington”

“No. 112
Gloucester
Terrace,
Hyde Park”

The Homes of George Smith as they are to-day.

Old School and Sexton's House, Haworth

IN THE STEPS OF THE BRONTËS

Charlotte, watching, saw with a mournful joy that Branwell, who of late years had scoffed at religion, was praying softly too. When his father had finished Branwell breathed an "Amen". Then, as they watched, a convulsion caused him to start up as if to rise; but Mr. Brontë caught him and it was not "standing", as many have said, but in his father's arms that Branwell died. When Mr. Brontë, laying him down, saw that he was dead, he cried out, just like David for Absalom, "Oh, my son, my son." And for a while they could not comfort him; and he was led away.

And Charlotte, staying in the room, looked down upon her dead brother. This was the first death she had witnessed; and of this last farewell she has written: "When I looked on the noble face and forehead of my dead brother (nature had favoured him with a fairer outside, as well as a finer constitution, than his sisters) and asked myself what had made him ever go wrong, tend ever downwards, when he had so many gifts to induce to, and aid in, an upward course, I seemed to receive an oppressive revelation of the feebleness of humanity—of the inadequacy of even genius to lead to true greatness if unaided by religion and principle. . . . When the struggle was over, and a marble calm began to succeed the last dread agony, I felt as I had never felt before, that there was peace and forgiveness for him in Heaven. All his errors—to speak plainly, all his vices—seemed nothing to me in that moment: every wrong he had done, every pain he had caused, vanished; his sufferings only were remembered; the wrench to natural affections only was left." And in another letter: "He is in God's hands now; and the All-Powerful is likewise the All-Merciful. A deep conviction that he rests at last—rests well after his brief, erring, suffering, feverish life—fills and quiets my mind now. The final separation, the spectacle of his pale corpse, gave me more acute, bitter pain than I could have imagined. Till the last hour comes we never know how much we can forgive, pity, regret a near relative. All his vices were and are nothing now. We remember only his woes."

And Emily? Emily, who was able to enfold her brother with compassion, while he was yet alive and in his sins, and before Death came with gifts of tenderness and a new vision; what of Emily when Branwell died?

CHAPTER TWENTY-TWO

“**T**HREE’s night and day, brother, both sweet things; sun, moon and stars, brother, all sweet things; there’s likewise a wind on the heath.” It was late September when Branwell died; and the autumn wind had whetted its blades on the heather. “Life is very sweet, brother; who would wish to die?” The old servants of the parsonage used to say for ever afterwards that Emily mourned most for Branwell; and Martha Brown’s sister would even declare, “Miss Emily died of a broken heart for love of her brother”; but this was the kindly drama of an ingenuous and fond woman. It was not the simple truth. That she mourned most was probably true. Poems she wrote in his memory show her own belief that her love and forgiveness for him, in his collapse and decay, and her grief after his death were more than anyone else in the world could find for him. But Emily Brontë did not die of a broken heart. The stoic, professed and proud of his profession, does not so die. “There’s the wind on the heath, brother; if I could only feel that, I would gladly live for ever.” Emily loved the night and the day; and especially the night; she loved the sun, moon, and stars; and most of all, perhaps, the wind on the heath. And yet it was the wind that took her, even as she performed her last act of love for Branwell.

When they carried Branwell through the gate at the bottom of the garden to lay him beneath the church pavement with his mother and two little sisters, there followed behind him all the family of the Browns, whose father had been his friend, and all the family and household of the parsonage, except Charlotte whom a sickness had prostrated. Emily followed, and the cold wind of autumn touched her. It touched her with a chill hand, and she sickened from that day.

On the Sunday, however, when Branwell’s funeral sermon was to be preached, she forced herself to attend the service and sat in the family pew looking very pale in her black dress. No doubt she gazed down at the stone which covered him and her mother,

and little Maria and Elizabeth, and thought her own thoughts which were not for the world. And either as she went to the church or came from it, or both times, the wind stabbed her again. "I could swear that glorious wind Has swept the world aside." Indeed it swept the world aside for her, since never after that day did she come out from the parsonage walls. Never strode on the moors again or stood on the summit in the wind's embrace and felt herself one with the world. You may think of that moorland wind, on the cold October Sunday, as a traitor with a knife, or, if you like, as the beloved which had come to fetch its lover.

She said nothing of the pain she was suffering; she complained only when her sisters tried to persuade her to treat her sickness or see a doctor; and so for a little they did not suspect that the wind's stab was mortal. On October 29th Charlotte wrote to Ellen. "I feel much more uneasy about my sisters than about myself just now. Emily's cold and cough are very obstinate. I fear she has pain in the chest, and I sometimes catch a shortness in her breathing, when she has moved at all quickly. She looks very, very thin and pale. Her reserved nature occasions me great uneasiness of mind. It is useless to question her—you get no answers. It is still more useless to recommend remedies—they are never adopted. . . . The weather has been most unfavourable of late: sudden changes of temperature, and cold, penetrating winds have been frequent here." And four days later to Mr. Williams: "I grieve to say that the shadow which has fallen on our quiet home still lingers around it. I am better, but others are ill now. Papa is not well, my sister has something like a slow inflammation of the lungs, and even our old servant, who has lived with us nearly a quarter of a century, is suffering under serious indisposition. I would fain hope that Emily is a little better this evening, but it is difficult to ascertain this. She is a real stoic in illness: she neither seeks nor will accept sympathy. To put any questions, to offer any aid, is to annoy; she will not yield a step before pain or sickness; not one of her ordinary avocations will she voluntarily renounce. You must look on and see her do what she is unfit to do, and not dare to say a word—a painful necessity for those to whom her health and existence are as precious as the life in their veins.

When she is ill there seems to be no sunshine in the world for me. The tie of a sister is near and dear indeed, and I think a certain harshness in her powerful and peculiar character only makes me cling to her more."

And Mr. Williams, that good friend and ready counsellor, tried to help. He recommended homœopathy and gave her the names of certain doctors. And Charlotte replied: "I put your most friendly letter into Emily's hands as soon as I had myself perused it, taking care, however, not to say a word in favour of homœopathy—that would not have answered. It is best usually to leave her to form her own judgment, and *especially* not to advocate the side you wish her to favour; if you do, she is sure to lean in the opposite direction, and ten to one will argue herself into non-compliance. Hitherto she has refused medicine, rejected medical advice; no reasoning, no entreaty, has availed to induce her to see a physician. After reading your letter she said, 'Mr. Williams' intention was kind and good, but he was under a delusion: Homœopathy was only another form of quackery.' Yet she may reconsider this opinion and come to a different conclusion; her second thoughts are often the best."

That same day—Charlotte tells the story in this same letter to Mr. Williams—she read to Emily and Anne, while one sat on either side of her by the fire, a criticism in the *North American Review* of the books of Currer, Ellis, and Acton Bell. It was a hostile notice, but so mistaken in its surmises that she thought it would amuse them. "As I sat between them at our quiet but now somewhat melancholy fireside, I studied the two ferocious authors. Ellis, the 'man of uncommon talents but dogged, brutal, and morose', sat leaning back in his easy chair drawing his impeded breath as he best could and looking, alas, piteously pale and wasted; it is not his wont to laugh, but he smiled half amused and half in scorn as he listened. Acton was sewing, no emotion ever stirs him to loquacity, so he only smiled too, dropping at the same time a single word of calm amazement to hear his character so darkly portrayed." That smile of Emily's was her last gesture of proud indifference to the estimates of the world. *Wuthering Heights* had earned hardly more success than her poems; and she was never to hear even a first and distant

note of the fine dawn-chorus with which the coming generation would greet it. Even Charlotte, who divined the power of the poems at her first glance, expressed more doubt than praise of *Wuthering Heights*. And Emily smiled to herself, and accepted the pain of misunderstanding as she accepted all other pain.

That was November 22nd, and by now the great and final fear had gripped Charlotte's heart. The next day she wrote to Ellen: "I told you Emily was ill in my last letter. She has not rallied yet. She is *very* ill. I believe if you were to see her your impression would be that there is no hope. A more hollow, wasted, pallid aspect I have not beheld. . . . More than once I have been forced boldly to regard the terrible event of her loss as possible, and even probable. But nature shrinks from such thoughts. I think Emily seems the nearest thing to my heart in the world."

And Charlotte, the Captain, fought for her as she had always fought for the family. She fought her silence, and she tried, she tried whatever was possible, to fight her disease. She fetched a doctor into the house, but Emily would not see him. Charlotte and Anne described the patient's symptoms and tried to make her take the medicines he sent, but she would not. Not beaten yet, Charlotte wrote to Dr. Epps, whom Mr. Williams had recommended; and her letter includes these sentences:

"The patient, respecting whose case Dr. Epps is consulted, and for whom his opinion and advice are requested, is a female in her 29th year. A peculiar reserve of character renders it difficult to draw from her all the symptoms of her malady, but as far as they can be ascertained they are as follows: Her appetite failed; she evinced a continual thirst, with a craving for acids, and required a constant change of beverage. In appearance she grew rapidly emaciated; her pulse—the only time she allowed it to be felt—was found to be 115 per minute. . . . The patient's sleep is supposed to be tolerably good at intervals, but disturbed by paroxysms of coughing. Her resolution to contend against illness being very fixed, she has never consented to lie in bed for a single day—she sits up from 7 in the morning till 10 at night. All medical aid she has rejected, insisting that Nature should be left to take her own course. . . . If Dr. Epps can, from what has here been stated, give an opinion on the

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case and prescribe a course of treatment, he will greatly oblige the patient's friends. Address—Miss Brontë, Parsonage, Haworth, Bradford, Yorks."

The last of Emily's wild Decembers had come; and there was snow on the moors and a sky like ice. Charlotte, her heart torn for Emily, went out on to the wind-beaten and tarnished moors to see if she could find one sprig of the purple heather that her sister had loved so well. She sought for this offering in sheltered places—in the lee of bilberry clumps and behind the thrashed furze—bending very low and pleating her brows together to focus her short-sighted eyes; and when at last she found one small brave bloom, she picked it and brought it home, and laid it on the table beside Emily that it might say to her all that she was not allowed to say.

Emily was forcing her hands to sew. She did not speak, but can we doubt that she understood?

§

The question will always be with us, Why did Emily refuse all treatment and help? Why did she insist on rising at seven and discharging the household tasks? Why, when her body was fevered and her every breath like a knife's entry, did she knead the dough and iron the linen and feed the dogs and pick up her sewing and try to stitch? The seemingly senseless defiance was compounded, I think, of many elements, and the least of them was a hard obstinacy; though, since no one is perfect, there was a touch of this in Emily at the last as there had been in all her days. "She dreaded giving trouble," said the servants in their gentle judgment; but there was far more in it than this. I can only lay before you some of her poems which are the one revelation she has left of herself, and submit an answer or two that I have drawn from them. First there was her proud stoicism.

And if I pray, the only prayer
That moves my lips for me
Is, "Leave the heart that now I bear,
And give me liberty."

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Yes, as my swift days near their goal
'Tis all that I implore—
In life and death a changeless soul,
With courage to end ire.

Then there was the Franciscan mysticism, and the transcendent quality of the mystic's vision is that it harmonises everything in a single whole, so that he knows that all is good, and that he is one with all; so that he accepts all and is ready for all: light and shadow, joy and pain, good and evil, life and death. I am brother to all, and I *am* all. Remember Francis: my living body, with all its foolishness, is my brother; and Death is my sister; welcome, sister Death. Yes, welcome; because in life the mystic has known moments of ecstasy when he believed himself (or as he must say, *knew* himself) in the embrace of the Eternal, and death is not to die, but to be brought a little nearer to, or to be finally vouchsafed, this ecstasy of union. There is no doubt whatever that Emily Brontë experienced such moments, and longed all her life to know them again. She longed to "dare the final bound".

What I love shall come like visitant of air,
Safe in secret power from lurking human snare;
What loves me, no word of mine shall e'er betray,
Though for faith unstained my life must forfeit pay.

Burn then, little lamp; glimmer straight and clear
Hush! a rustling wing stirs, methinks, the air!
He for whom I wait thus ever comes to me
Strange Power! I trust thy might; trust thou my constancy.

But motives are mixed, and over against the stoicism which scorned to fear death, and the mystical "knowledge" which could perhaps welcome it, there was probably so normal a thing as the *spes phthisica* the confident but delusive hope, enduring in the phthisical patient even to the end, that his condition is not really grave and he will recover. And, strengthening this, there was her absolute faith in the God within her whose other name was Life. "I am master of the life in me; there is no room for death, if I do not choose to die. . ." Here it is enough

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to quote her grandest song—the “too bold dying song” that so shook the heart of Matthew Arnold. You remember?

She who sank
Baffled, unknown, self-consum'd;
Whose too bold dying song
Shook, like a clarion blast, my soul.

We know now that she wrote it in January 1846; but we know also that she revised it at this time when death was near, and that Charlotte found it in her little desk after she was dead. Let it still be known, then, as her *Last Lines*.

No coward soul is mine,
No trembler in the world's storm-troubled sphere:
I see Heaven's glories shine,
And faith shines equal, arming me from fear.

O God within my breast,
Almighty, ever-present Deity!
Life—that in me has rest,
As I—undying Life—have power in thee!

Vain are the thousand creeds
That move men's hearts; unutterably vain;
Worthless as withered weeds,
Or idlest froth amid the boundless main,

To waken doubt in one
Holding so fast by thine infinity;
So surely anchored on
The steadfast rock of immortality.

With wide-embracing love
Thy spirit animates eternal years,
Pervades and broods above,
Changes, sustains, dissolves, creates, and rears.

Though earth and man were gone,
And suns and universes ceased to be,
And Thou were left alone,
Every existence would exist in Thee.

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There is not room for Death,
Nor atom that his might could render void;
Thou—THOU art Being and Breath,
And what THOU art may never be destroyed.

§

So the wild December days went by, and for not one of them did she lie in bed. Not once did she fail to rise with the morning and go about the tasks of the house. Her two sisters, huddled together in the living-room, frightened by the mystery, listened to the sounds of her labour in the kitchen or to the panting of her breath as she paused in ascending the stairs. Charlotte was always inspired, after Emily's death, when she wrote of her; it was as if she could not speak of that lost sister without partaking of her genius. And we all remember how she wrote: "My sister Emily first declined. . . . Never in all her life had she lingered over any task that lay before her, and she did not linger now. She sank rapidly. She made haste to leave us. Yet, while physically she perished, mentally she grew stronger than we had yet known her. Day by day, when I saw with what a front she met suffering, I looked on her with an anguish of wonder and love. I have seen nothing like it; but indeed I have never seen her parallel in anything. Stronger than a man; simpler than a child, her nature stood alone. The awful point was, that while full of ruth for others, on herself she had no pity; the spirit was inexorable to the flesh; from the trembling hands, the unnerved limbs, the faded eyes, the same service was exacted as they had rendered in health." On the evening of December 18th, when it was time to feed the dogs, Emily rose from the table in the living-room and, holding in the trembling hands an apronful of broken meat and bread, went out into the flagged passage. But there the cold wind, which had come to fetch her, touched and caressed her, and she staggered against the wall.

Her sisters ran forward and begged her to leave her task and rest, but she would not, and with a wan smile she went forward and, stooping down, gave their supper to Flossy and Keeper. She returned to the living-room, and

Charlotte read to her an essay of Emerson's but perceived after a time that she was hearing nothing. Charlotte stopped reading, and hoped to continue the essay for her the next day. Emily went to bed, and in the early morning Charlotte and Anne heard her moaning in her sleep, for in sleep, and in sleep alone, she was not master of herself. I think she slept now in the large bedroom where her mother and aunt had died; for there was a fire, we read, in the room where she lay. When she awoke she rose and, rebelling against the pain, dressed herself unaided and sat by the fire to comb her long brown hair. But the comb fell from her hand into the embers and began to burn. She was too weak to stoop down and save it; and when Martha Brown came in she said, "Martha, my comb's down there; I was too weak to stoop and pick it up."

You may see that comb in the Museum today with the central teeth burned out of it. There is so little in the parsonage of Emily, the elusive, the shy, the fugitive, the scornful; all is of Charlotte and Anne and Branwell and Mr. Brontë; but there is this broken comb which fell from her in her weakness, like her life; there is this single feather which dropped to earth as the wild bird flew away. It has moved one poet to an hyperbole that I, for one, can understand and accept: "I have seen that old broken comb, with a large piece burned out of it," wrote Madame Duclaux; "and have thought it, I own, more pathetic than the bones of the eleven thousand virgins at Cologne, or the time-blackened Holy Face of Lucca. Sad, chance confession of human weakness; mournful counterpart of that chainless soul which to the end maintained its fortitude and rebellion."

Slowly Emily came down to the living-room, where Anne was working and Charlotte writing a letter to Ellen. The letter was about Emily, and in it were these words: "I should have written to you before, if I had had one word of hope to say; but I have not. She grows daily weaker. . . . Moments so dark as these I have never known. I pray for God's support to us all."

In the room was a long mahogany sofa, upholstered in horse-hair and leather, and Emily, sitting down upon it, picked up her needle and tried to sew. But this too was beyond her now. She could do nothing—nothing but suffer the last pains. The

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suffering increased, but she did not speak of it till about noon; and then she said in a whisper, "If you will send for a doctor, I will see him now."

That was Emily's "Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani?" Had the God Whose other name was Life, and in Whom her faith was absolute, forsaken her?

The agony of death was upon her as she sat upon the sofa's end; and Charlotte and Anne besought her to go to bed, but she cried "No, no"; and sat on. Her sisters, unspeaking, watched the deathly change in her face. And at about two o'clock she put a hand upon the sofa and tried to rise. Instead she fell back, and they saw that she was dead. Emily Brontë did not die in bed or even in a bedroom: she died in the room where she had worked with her needle and written her poems of love and life and immortality; and if it is no longer allowed that Branwell died standing, it is very nearly true of Emily. She tried to rise for the great moment. "I—undying Life—have power in Thee."

The next day they unlocked the gate at the foot of the garden and carried Emily to the side of Branwell and her mother and sisters in the vault beneath the church floor. And this time there was another besides the family and the servants, who followed her to bed—for Emily was gone to bed at last. Keeper followed, and he stayed quiet in the church, couched at their feet in the family pew, while the service was read; and when it was all over he went up and lay against Emily's door.

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And in the light of the next day Charlotte, inspired, sat in the living-room, where Anne was her only companion now, and wrote to Ellen. Her pen, defying the sobs, wrote on. "Emily suffers no more from pain and weakness now. She will never suffer more in this world. She is gone after a short hard conflict. She died on Tuesday, the very day I wrote to you. . . . Yes, there is no Emily in time or on earth now. Yesterday we put her poor, wasted mortal frame quietly under the church pavement. We are very calm at present. Why should it be other-

wise? The anguish of seeing her suffer is over; the spectacle of the pains of death is gone by; the funeral day is past. We feel she is at peace. No need to tremble now for the hard frost and the keen wind. Emily does not feel them." And four days after Christmas day she wrote to her good friend, Mr. Williams, "Well, the loss is ours, not hers, and some sad comfort I take, as I hear the wind blow and feel the cutting keenness of the frost, in knowing that the elements bring her no more suffering; their severity cannot reach her grave; her fever is quieted, her restlessness soothed, her deep, hollow cough is hushed for ever; we do not hear it at night nor listen for it in the morning; we have not the conflict of the strangely strong spirit and the fragile frame—relentless conflict—once seen, never to be forgotten. . . . So I will not now ask why Emily was torn from us in the fulness of our attachment, rooted up in the prime of her own days, in the promise of her powers; why her existence now lies like a field of green corn trodden down, like a tree in full bearing struck at the root. I will only say, sweet is rest after labour and calm after tempest, and repeat again and again that Emily knows that now."

Like so many others I have stood in the church and looked through the stone floor towards the narrow chamber where Emily lies, caught and impounded at last; but I can never feel that the Emily I love is there. But there is nowhere on Haworth Moor, or Stanbury Moor, or up on Withens Height among the head waters of the streams, that I do not seem to feel her presence; for me she is there among the heather, the bilberry, and the bracken—there for ever—singing of freedom and a chainless soul and the immortality in her heart.

CHAPTER TWENTY-THREE

“YES,” said Martha. “They were all well when Mr. Branwell was buried; but Miss Emily broke down the next week. We saw she was ill, but she never would own it, never would have a doctor near her, never would breakfast in bed—the last morning she got up, and she dying; all the time—the rattle in her throat while she *would* dress herself: and neither Miss Brontë nor I dared offer to help her. She died just before Christmas—you’ll see the date there”—Martha had taken Mrs. Gaskell into the church and was showing her the grave; all this is in a letter which Mrs. Gaskell did not intend for publication and which was not published till 1919—“and we all went to her funeral, Master and Keeper, her dog, walking first side by side, and then Miss Brontë and Miss Anne, and then Tabby and me. Next day Miss Anne took ill in just the same way—and it was ‘Oh, if it was but Spring and I could go to the sea, —Oh, if it was but Spring!’ ”

Emily fell into her last sickness after Branwell’s death; Anne after Emily’s. We cannot say, for the quiet Anne spoke so little, if her grief at the loss of Emily was so strong as to disarm her resistance to disease; but we may remember that Emily, though eighteen months older than she, was to her as a twin-sister. From the moment of Emily’s going Anne grew steadily, alarmingly worse. “My father and my sister Anne are far from well,” wrote Charlotte to Mr. Williams on that Christmas Day. “As for me, God has hitherto most graciously sustained me; so far I have felt adequate to bear my own burden and even to offer a little help to others. I am not ill; I can get through my daily duties, and do something towards keeping hope and energy alive in our mourning household. My father says to me almost hourly, ‘Charlotte, you must bear up, I shall sink if you fail me’; these words, you can conceive, are a stimulus to nature. The sight, too, of my sister Anne’s very still but deep sorrow wakes in me such fear for her that I dare not falter. Somebody *must* cheer the rest.”

So did Charlotte, the ship's captain, keep her small hand on the wheel.

"Care of Papa and Anne is necessarily my chief present object in life, to the exclusion of all that could give me interest with my publishers or their connections. Should Anne get better, I think I could rally and become Currer Bell once more, but if otherwise I look no further: sufficient for the day is the evil thereof. Anne is very patient in her illness, as patient as Emily was unflinching. I recall one sister and look at the other with a sort of reverence as well as affection—under the test of suffering neither has faltered. . . . If you answer this, write to me as you would to a person in an average state of tranquillity and happiness. I want to keep myself as firm and calm as I can. While Papa and Anne want me, I hope, I pray, never to fail them. . . . May God long preserve to you the domestic treasures you value; and when bereavement at last comes, may He give you strength to bear it."

Thus did the captain, on the bridge, gaze into the storm.

It was not a fortnight after Emily's funeral when the doctor told them—told Charlotte and Mr. Brontë only, I suppose—that Anne's consumption was in an advanced state and that she would die soon. A doctor summoned from Leeds pronounced the same opinion. January 18th, 1849: Charlotte to Mr. Williams: "His report I forbear to dwell on for the present—even skilful physicians have often been mistaken in their conjectures." So Love must hope.

Like Emily, Anne rose and came downstairs every morning; she was not, so far as the letters reveal, one day in bed; nor did she die in bed. She sat with Charlotte in the living-room. "Anne and I sit alone and in seclusion as you fancy us, but we do not study now, she can scarcely read; she occupies Emily's chair; she does not get *well*." Day after day these two surviving sisters sat there together, Charlotte and the condemned. Though Charlotte was condemned too: one of the most loving sisters who ever lived, she sat condemned, as she knew, to a lifetime of loneliness. Being Charlotte of the firm will and indomitable heart, she picked up *Shirley* and tried to resume work on it. "I try to write now and then. The effort was a hard one at first. It renewed the terrible loss of last December strangely. Worse

than useless did it seem to attempt to write that there no longer lived an 'Ellis Bell' to read; the whole book, with every hope founded on it faded to vanity and vexation of spirit." But the book was sometimes, I fancy, a consolation too. *Shirley* was a portrait of Emily; and when one has lost a loved person, there is a sweet assuagement in writing about her. The love that can no longer reach the beloved pours from one's pen on to the page.

Whether or not it is true that the mysterious part of Emily could feel an eagerness for death with its high promise, it is clear, pathetically clear, that Anne, a simpler and more limpid soul, unflooded by strange waters from the deep, did not wish to die. She longed to recover, and she tried to recover. She took her medicine in hope. She allowed them to blister her side. She believed that if she could last till the spring, and then could get to the sea, the warmth and the sea air would cure her. Her mind, as she sat in the living-room with Charlotte, flew again and again to Scarborough and its sea-front, because she had known it when she was governess to the Robinsons of Thorp Green.

When Charlotte doubted whether they ought both to leave their father even if Anne were strong enough to be moved, Anne proposed that Ellen Nussey should accompany her and promised not to be a nuisance; but Charlotte shrank from the idea of laying this burden upon Ellen, and Ellen's friends feared the responsibility. "My dear Miss Nussey," Anne wrote when April had begun, and the spring, for which she had longed, was already a warm sweet encouragement in the air, "I thank you greatly for your kind letter, and your ready compliance with my proposal, as far as the *will* can go at least. I see, however, that your friends are unwilling that you should take the responsibility of accompanying me under present circumstances. But I do not think there would be any great responsibility in the matter. I know, and everybody knows, that you would be as kind and helpful as anyone could possibly be, and I hope I should not be very troublesome. It would be as a companion, not as a nurse, that I should wish for your company; otherwise I shouldn't venture to ask it. . . . My cough still troubles me a good deal, especially in the night, and

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what seems worse than all, I am subject to great shortness of breath on going upstairs or any slight exertion. Under these circumstances I think there is no time to be lost. I have no horror of death; if I thought it inevitable, I think I could quietly resign myself to the prospect, in the hope that you, dear Miss Nussey, would give as much of your company as you possibly could to Charlotte, and be a sister to her in my stead. But I wish it would please God to spare me, not only for Papa's and Charlotte's sakes, but because I long to do some good in the world before I leave it. I have many schemes in my head for future practice—humble and limited indeed—but still I should not like them all to come to nothing, and myself to have lived to so little purpose. But God's will be done."

This, in prose, is the very heart of her last poem. For, just as Emily, before going, left a poem in her desk to the undying God within her, so Anne, the simpler and more conventional, on the margin of death, wrote a poem to the old God in her father's church. And just as Emily's is her grandest song so Anne's is her most famous; indeed the most famous of all the Brontës' works, because it is sung as a hymn all over the world by people who do not read Emily's poems, and have not heard of *Wuthering Heights* or even, it may be, of *Jane Eyre*. The gentle hand of Anne Brontë still comforts the poor city-dweller when the last sickness has come; still teaches the rustic moralist to die. To such purpose, at least, had she lived.

I hoped that with the brave and strong,
My portioned task might lie;
To toil amid the busy throng,
With purpose pure and high.

But God has fixed another part,
And He has fixed it well:
I said so with my bleeding heart,
When first the anguish fell.

Thou, God, hast taken our delight,
Our treasured hope away:
Thou bid'st us now weep through the night
And sorrow through the day.



"Marshlands," the old Grammar School, Haworth



The walled-up "Gate of the Dead."
(Tabby's tomb in the middle foreground)

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These weary hours will no: be lost,
These days of misery,
These nights of darkness, anguish-tost,
Can I but turn to Thee.

With secret labour to susta.n
In humble patience every blow;
To gather fortitude from pain,
And hope and holiness from woe;

Thus let me serve Thee from my heart,
Whate'er may be my written fate:
Whether thus early to depart,
Or yet a while to wait.

If Thou shouldst bring me back to life,
More humbled I should be;
More wise—more strengthened for the strife
More apt to lean on Thee.

Should death be standing at the gate,
Thus should I keep my vow:
But, Lord! whatever be my fate,
Oh, let me serve Thee now!

§

At last, when May came with an invitation even warmer than April's, and the sun beckoned from the sky, Charlotte resolved to give Anne her desire and get her to the sea. Mr. Brontë encouraged her to do so. Some of the women biographers, in their strange psychological need to attack the father of the Brontës, have accused him of selfishness in not letting Charlotte leave him and take Anne away. Is it that they do not see what they do not want to see? Have they not read Charlotte's statement that she dared not move Anne till the weather was warm, and then her simple sentence to Ellen: "You ask how I have arranged about leaving Papa. I could make no special arrangement. He wishes me to go with Anne." She engaged lodgings on the sea-front at Scarborough; two fine rooms, a sitting-room and bedroom, both overlooking the sea, at No. 2 Cliff,

Scarborough. She arranged with Ellen Nussey to meet them at Leeds station and come with them as friend and helper. And so it is that we have an eye-witness's account of Anne's last four days in the world, because Ellen wrote the story down for Mrs. Gaskell.

Wednesday, 23rd May, was the day they proposed to start; but Anne was too ill to be moved on that day. Ellen waited on the Leeds station, but Charlotte could get no message to her, and she waited long hours in vain. Next morning, doubting and anxious, she hurried to Haworth and arrived at the parsonage just in time to help Charlotte and Martha Brown carry Anne to the carriage that waited in the lane. Martha, standing by the parsonage gate and watching them go, shook her head. Her family over the road agreed with her that "death was written on Anne's face".

The three women, Charlotte, Ellen, and Anne, travelled from Keighley to Leeds, and from Leeds to York; and everywhere, as Charlotte says in a letter to Mr. Williams, written from No. 2, Cliff, Scarborough, they found assistance: "there was always an arm ready to do for my sister what I was not quite strong enough to do: lift her in and out of the carriages, carry her across the line, etc.". At York Anne was cheerful and happy and insisted on going to see the cathedral and being allowed to rejoice in its beauty. They rested the night at York and went on next day to Scarborough. All the way between York and the sea, from the Ouse Vale to the Vale of Pickering, Anne looked out of the window and drew their attention to everything that charmed or interested her; she looked at the rich green fields in the plain and at the moors in the far north and the wolds in the south; watching, as it passed by, a world of plain and copse and hill bedecked with the splendours of May. "Look thy last on all things lovely."

In the pleasant sitting-room at Scarborough she sat by the window and looked out at the bay. The sea at the time was calm as glass. On the next day, the Saturday, she went for an hour's drive in a donkey-chair on the sands and asked to be allowed to hold the reins herself, because she feared the boy was driving his beast too hard. On alighting where Ellen awaited her, she begged him always to be good to the animal. On the Sunday

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she wanted to go to church, but Charlotte and Ellen dissuaded her; and in the afternoon she went for a short walk. Finding a sheltered seat near the beach, she told Charlotte and Ellen to leave her there. She would be quite happy, and they must walk on and see other parts of the town which she knew so well. I wonder what were her thoughts as she sat there alone, looking at the sea and the cliff and the happy holiday-makers on the strand.

That evening, Ellen tells us, there was a splendid sunset. "The castle on the cliff stood in proud glory gilded by the rays of the declining sun. The distant ships glittered like burnished gold. The little boats near the beach heaved on the ebbing tide, inviting occupants. The view was grand beyond description. Anne was drawn in her easy chair to the window, to enjoy the scene with us. Her face became illumined almost as much as the glorious scene she gazed upon. Little was said, for it was plain that her thoughts were driven by the imposing view before her to penetrate forwards to the regions of unfading glory. She again thought of public worship and wished us to leave her and join those who were assembled in the House of God. We declined, gently urging the duty and pleasure of staying with her."

Monday, the 28th. Like Emily, she rose at seven, insisted on dressing herself, and came into the sitting-room and sat by the fire. And, as with Emily, it was near noon when a change came upon her; quite calmly she told them she believed she was going to die, and asked if it would be possible to get her home. A doctor was sent for; and, still sitting in her easy chair, perfectly composed and serene, she asked him to tell her the truth, for she was not afraid to die. He told her that her life was ebbing fast.

Hearing this, she thanked him for being frank with her; and when he had gone, after promising to come again, she put her hands together and said a prayer, first for Charlotte and then for Ellen. To Ellen she said: "Be a sister in my stead. Give Charlotte as much of your company as you can," and then thanked them both for their kindness. Her restlessness increasing, they carried her to the sofa, and asked if she was easier; and she answered, smiling gratefully, that *they* could

not give her ease now, but soon all would be well. Seeing that Charlotte was hardly able to hold her tears, she said, "Take courage, Charlotte; take courage"; and she told her that she was happy, and grateful to God that death was come, and come so gently. And just about two o'clock, the same hour as Emily died on her sofa, Anne, without a sigh, died on hers.

§

Charlotte and Ellen buried her in the old churchyard of St. Mary's, Scarborough. There were but three mourners, Charlotte, Ellen, and a strange lady who, hearing of Anne's death and sympathising with her sister and friend, went to the churchyard and stood unobtrusively in the background, the sole representative and ambassador of those of us who, for a hundred years, without knowing the Brontë sisters, have paid our tribute to them. The grave is in a portion of the burial ground beyond the east end of the church near the cemetery wall. Pieces have been chipped from its edges by those who prefer the display of their spoils to reverence for a great pain that is past. And there she sleeps, the only one of that family, father, mother, and six children, who lies away from Haworth church and under the open sky.

Much has been said, much suggested, about this burial of Anne far away from the others, and Mr. Brontë's absence from the funeral of his youngest child; Charlotte has been accused of inconsiderateness, and her father, of course, of selfishness; but the reason of it all seems simple enough. It was a deliberate, considered, and considerate act of Charlotte's. In a letter to Mr. Williams, privately printed by Mr. T. J. Wise, we can read: "For the present Anne's ashes rest apart from the others. I have buried her here at Scarborough to save Papa the anguish of the return and a third funeral." In a cold, official document, the certificate of Anne's death, we can discern the last friendly offices of Ellen Nussey. We read "Twenty-eighth May 1849, 2 St. Nicholas Cliff, Scarborough, Anne Brontë, Female, Spinster, Consumption 6 months not certified, Ellen Nussey Present at the Death, Brookroyd, Birstall nr. Leeds."

CHAPTER TWENTY-FOUR

CHARLOTTE did not return at once to the parsonage after she had laid Anne in this lonely grave. She stayed for a little in Scarborough and Ellen stayed with her. She went to Easton, near Bridlington, Ellen accompanying her, and they stayed in a small farm they had visited together once before. Ellen, after a time, had to return home, and still Charlotte did not leave the coast and the sea and cross the width of Yorkshire that lay between her and her stone-grey village among the Pennine hills. She stayed and wandered alone. It was as if she could not face the parsonage and the living-room on the left of the hall. Mr. Brontë encouraged her to remain away and rest—“the single unselfish act”, says Miss Isabel Clarke, “that can be recorded of him”. So wildly do they write. At last, after a month’s absence, she came home. She came up the lane and through the wicket in the side of the garden and up the steps to the door.

And, like a lost soul, she went into the living-room. Listen to her letter to Ellen. “I got here a little before eight o’clock. All was clean and bright, waiting for me. Papa and the servants were well; and all received me with an affection that should have consoled. The dogs seemed in a strange ecstasy. I am certain they regarded me as the harbinger of others. The dumb creatures thought that, as I was returned, those who had been so long absent were not far behind. I left Papa soon, and went into the dining-room: I shut the door—I tried to be glad that I was come home. I have always been glad before—except once: even then I was cheered. But this time joy was not to be the sensation. I felt that the house was all silent—the rooms were all empty. . . . The agony that *was to be undergone*, and *was not* to be avoided came on. I underwent it. . . .

“The great trial is when evening closes and night approaches. At that hour we used to assemble in the dining-room—we used to talk. Now I sit by myself—necessarily I am silent. I cannot help thinking of their last days, remembering their sufferings, and what they said and did, and how they looked in mortal

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affliction. Perhaps all this will become less poignant in time.

“Let me thank you once more, dear Ellen, for your kindness to me which I do not mean to forget. How did you think all looking at home? Papa thought me a little stronger; he said my eyes were not so sunken.”

And to that firm friend and loyal listener, William Smith Williams: “I am now again at home, where I returned last Thursday. I call it *home* still—much as London would be called London if an earthquake should shake its streets to ruins. Papa is there, and two most affectionate and faithful servants, and two old dogs, in their way as faithful and affectionate. . . . But here my sisters will come no more. Keeper may visit Emily’s bedroom—as he still does day by day—and Flossy may look wistfully round for Anne, they will never see them again—nor shall I—at least the human part of me. I must not write so sadly, but how can I help thinking and feeling sadly? In the daytime effort and occupation aid me, but when evening darkens, something in my heart revolts against the burden of solitude—the sense of loss and want grows almost too much for me. I am not good or amiable in such moments, and it is only the thought of my dear father in the next room, or of the kind servants in the kitchen, or some caress from the poor dogs, which restores me to softer sentiments and more rational views. . . . This pain must be undergone; its poignancy, I trust, will be blunted one day. Ellen would have come back with me but I would not let her. I knew it would be better to face the desolation at once.”

There was no one, no one in the world, to divide the desolation with her.

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And for the larger part of each of the next five years, till June 1854, she sat in that room alone: world-famous and alone. She went on with *Shirley*, her tale of Emily. The first chapter which she wrote after Anne’s death, beginning it at Easton, was the twenty-fourth, and she headed it “The Valley of the Shadow of Death”. Is it nothing, an accident, that the last sentences of that chapter begin, “Caroline enjoyed such peaceful rest that

night; circled by her mother's arms and pillow'd on her breast, that she forgot to wish for any other stay . . ."? It is always said, and Ellen always claimed, that Caroline Helstone, in *Shirley*, was Charlotte's portrait of Ellen Nussey; but she is much more reminiscent of Charlotte herself; and consider: Caroline is etymologically the same name as Charlotte, and Helstone or Hell's stone or Thunderbolt may derive from *brontë*, the Greek for thunder. Aware of this Greek word, and proud of it, Charlotte would sometimes call Branwell "Patrick Branwell Boanerges".

She wrote on and on in the silent room. But it was difficult—how difficult! "Oh, if the void Death has left were a little closed up, if the dreary word *nevermore* would cease sounding in my ears, I think I could yet do something. . . . Even intellect, even imagination, will not dispense with the ray of domestic cheerfulness, with the gentle spur of family discussion. Late in the evening, and all through the nights, I fall into a condition of mind which turns entirely to the past—to memory. . . . You cannot help me and must not trouble yourself in any shape to sympathise with me. It is my cup, and I must drink it, as others drink theirs."

When evening came on she wrote largely by candlelight. And when her weak eyes hurt in the dim and flickering illumination, she laid the work aside and sat there, knitting, knitting. The clock ticked on the stairs; her father moved in his study across the passage; Tabby and Martha's voices sounded in the kitchen and the hall. And she counted her stitches and went on knitting.

Spring came again, and summer, and she walked alone on the moors. Perhaps because Mr. Williams had been the first male reader to appreciate her work, her pen dipped its point in a peculiar brilliance when it traced a letter to him; and to him she says: "I am free to walk on the moors; but when I go out there alone, everything reminds me of the time when others were with me, and then the moors seem a wilderness, featureless, solitary, saddening. My sister Emily had a peculiar love for them, and there is not a knoll of heather, not a branch of fern, not a young bilberry leaf, not a fluttering lark or linnet, but reminds me of her. The distant prospects were Anne's delight, and when I look round she is in the blue tints, the pale mists, the waves and shadows of the horizon."

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Sometimes on summer evenings, I cannot doubt, she would leave her writing because her energy was spent, or her eyes smarted and, rising, she would go to the window and look out at the garden. Perhaps she would sit in the window-seat, as she always loved to do. And she would see the currant bushes under the dark-grey wall, where she and her sisters used to gather the fruit; and the cherry tree under a window down whose branches Emily as a child once climbed in a game; and the lilac beneath which Emily used to sit with her little rosewood writing-desk; and the narrow pathway down the midst of the grass to the locked gate that led to the church and its pavement. From across the lane came the sounds of mallet and chisel in the stonemason's yard; and from beyond the cluster of cottages the muted ringing of horses' hooves and iron-shod wheels on the stones of the sloping streets.

"Shirley . . . you never had a sister; but it flashes on me at this moment how sisters feel towards each other—affection twined with their life, which no shocks of feeling can uproot, which little quarrels only trample an instant, that it may spring more freshly when the pressure is removed; affection that no passion can ultimately outrival, with which even love itself cannot do more than compete in force and truth." And in the same book we detect Charlotte in her window-seat looking out: "But Jessie, I will write about you no more. This is an autumn evening, wet and wild. There is only one cloud in the sky, but it curtains it from pole to pole. The wind cannot rest; it hurries sobbing over hills of sullen outline, colourless with twilight and mist. Rain has beat all day on that church tower. It rises dark from the stony enclosure of its graveyard. The nettles, the long grass, and the tombs all drip with wet."

Soon after these words there is a row of asterisks on her page; and I assume she left the window-seat and her writing, and came back into the room.

Perhaps you would like to see that room as Mrs. Gaskell found it when she visited Charlotte in the autumn of 1853. "The parlour has been evidently refurnished within the last few years, since Miss Brontë's success has enabled her to have a little more

money to spend. Everything fits into, and is in harmony with, the idea of a country parsonage possessed by people of very moderate means. The prevailing colour of the room is crimson, to make a warm setting for the cold, grey landscape without. There is her likeness by Richmond, and an engraving from Lawrence's picture of Thackeray; and two recesses, on each side of the high, narrow, old-fashioned mantelpiece, filled with books—books given to her, books she has bought, and which tell of her individual pursuits and tastes; *not* standard books. . . . We sit up together till ten, or past; and after I go I hear Miss Brontë come down and walk up and down the room for an hour or so."

§

As the years pass over her, we may allow ourselves some consideration of this little woman as woman, novelist, and critic. Inevitably the first of these is parent to the other two. Within the small narrow breast of Charlotte Brontë, as in a sealed closet, an original, unconforming, rebellious power quarrelled violently with a conventional, conforming, pietistic partner; and she was hardly aware of it. She respected and loved both quarrelling partners; but her limitations sprang from the fact that she loved the conformist a little more than the rebel, of whom she was sometimes afraid.

And the result of this preference was that her fine, strong, critical intelligence was clapt in moral bands that impeded it, exhausted it, and often disabled it completely. She resented much; she resented the social and economic frustrations of all women and especially spinsters; she resented the lack of opportunity for the force she felt within her; she resented, that is to say, all the outward and material barriers; and she penned her resentment in words of blistering acid; but she did not resent the inward and spiritual harness which was her real constraint. She did not resent but gloried in her over-intense moralism, her Low Church intolerances, and her High Tory hates. She did not resent, she did not even perceive, the strong, limited father who sat in her as he sat in his three-decker pulpit and through her lips preached at the world and through her eyes appraised the habits of men. She loved all that he stood for; loving it, as I have said,

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a little more than the doctrines of the changeling rebel who sometimes occupied his sacred place and lectured the world. Indeed she does not seem to have realised that these orators were two different persons, and that their outlook and outpourings were as different and opposed as cold asbestos and fire.

So there she sits in her little room, the picture of a rebel imprisoned in her stiff black Victorian dress; a stormy genius constricted in the whaleboned corsets of her day. Never perhaps was a restless and escaping spirit so held within the cage of her own naïveté and so in love with the straight and rigid bars. And thus instead of an eagle like Emily, surveying from the high, free air the width of the world and the littleness of men, we have in Charlotte, all too often, an ill-tempered and snapping parrot who pecks at the free between her golden bars.

Charlotte is always best seen in contrast with Emily. Emily, no one knows how, freed herself, as neither of her sisters did, from the mental and moral costiveness that produced asperity in Charlotte and melancholy in Anne. Her work is the stronger and the greater because she escaped from pietism and convention to the unhallowed simplicity of the moor. In the whole library of English Literature you will find no novel more completely "undated" than *Wuthering Heights*; the book is untouched by the moral prepossessions of any age; its author is no more on the side of the conventional and common-sensible Nelly Dean than she is on the side of the pietistic Joseph, or the wild and amoral Cathy, or the evil but helpless Heathcliff; she is above and pitying them all; and the book is of no time and of all time. Charlotte's books are stamped with the impress of 1846.

But these are unsupported affirmations about Charlotte; the mere submissions of counsel presenting a case; we must call our evidence to sustain them. Our first witness shall be Charlotte herself. She stated the conflict within her as early as 1836 when she was twenty and writing to Ellen. "I am a very coarse, commonplace wretch, Ellen. I have some qualities which make me very miserable, some feelings that you can have no participation in, that very few people in the world can understand. I don't pride myself on these peculiarities. I strive to conceal and suppress them as much as I can, but they burst out sometimes,

and those who see the explosion despise me, and I hate myself for days afterwards."

Next there is the evidence of her books. It is as true of Charlotte as of Emily that the characters which come to full life in her stories are the unbridled, the rebellious, or the violent: Paul Emmanuel, Mr. Rochester, Jane Eyre, Lucy Snowe, and even Frances, the little lace-maker in *The Professor*; these are living souls, life breathed into their nostrils from the very being of Charlotte, just as often as they are rebellious and defying the world; they are wooden and dead when they become (as they all do at times, or in the end) pious and good and conventional. It is exactly the same with the hundreds and hundreds of Charlotte's letters, and especially those addressed to the good intelligence of Mr. Williams: they flame into life when she has forgotten the parsonage around her and the church at the foot of the garden, and is seeing the world with unblinded eyes and stating in splendid language what she sees; they fall into flat, dull embers when she feels the closeness of the parsonage and the pew; then they are little but the commonplace utterances of an enclosed and somewhat censorious Victorian lady whose only mental endowment is an unusual opulence of words.

And now consider for what it is worth, and it is worth something, her preference for the masculine, libertarian, and sometimes violent George Sand to the domestic and delicate Jane Austen. Consider indeed her hostility to Jane Austen's quiet and unimpassioned domesticity. And consider also, what to me seems extraordinarily revealing, her terror, blent with an admiration that is almost worship, of the performance of the actress Rachel. The terror, craving release, wrestles with the worship and wins. "On Saturday I went to hear and see Rachel; a wonderful sight—terrible as if the earth had cracked deep at your feet and revealed a glimpse of hell. I shall never forget it. She made me shudder to the marrow of my bones; in her some fiend has certainly taken up an incarnate home. She is not a woman; she is a snake; she is the ——"

The moralist, uppermost, will not allow Charlotte to write the word. She could not forget Rachel: months afterwards she wrote to another friend: "Rachel's acting transfixed me with wonder,

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enchained me with interest, and thrilled me with horror. . . . The great gift of genius she undoubtedly has; but, I fear, she rather abuses it than turns it to good account." There is the same fear and worship of Emily's free genius, and in this conflict, of course, the worship won. "Ellis has a strong original mind, full of strange though sombre power. When he writes poetry that power speaks in language at once condensed, elaborated, and refined, but in prose it breaks forth in scenes which shock more than they attract." Can it be doubted that she is frightened of Rachel and Emily because she sees, loose and at large in them, the thing she has repressed in herself?

And more evidence of the same sort could be deduced, I suspect, from her persecution and dislike of her own creation, Lucy Snowe, whom she knows to be herself. How the rebel in her hates that inhibited, frustrated, and soured little teacher. "I am not leniently disposed towards Miss *Frost*; from the beginning I never meant to appoint her lines in pleasant places." How different from her adulation of the free and masterful Shirley, who must have the best of everything before the end. And finally there is the debility which weights her limbs all through her life and the nervous headaches which so constantly "prostrate" her: symptoms surely of the conflict between incompatible elements which shook her and wasted her whenever she was trying to project herself, in books or in person, before the world. "It (the last volume of *Villette*) would speedily be finished, could I ward off certain obnoxious headaches, which, whenever I get into the spirit of my work, are apt to seize and prostrate me."

She was only truly at peace when she sat away from the world; with her sisters at first, and then alone. That is why, now as we watch, she is sitting alone in this small and empty room, a dutiful rebel, a loyal mutineer.

§

The heavy interest in moral measurements hampers and disorders her flight as a novelist and too often grounds her on the hard earth. It too often dims her fine eyes when she is

criticising her own work or that of others. At times she is so right in her conception of what a novel should be. Her demand for a free and independent vision is proclaimed very early in a letter to Ellen. She is but seventeen when she advises this protégée: "If I were you I would not be too anxious to spend my time in reading whilst in town. Make use of your own eyes for the purposes of observation now, and, for a time at least, lay aside the spectacles with which authors would furnish us."

And twenty years later the same clear, free note is sounded in a letter to Mrs. Gaskell: "A thought strikes me. Do you, who have so many friends—so large a circle of acquaintance—find it easy, when you sit down to write, to isolate yourself from all those ties, and their sweet associations, so as to be your *own woman*, uninfluenced or swayed by the consciousness of how your work may affect other minds; what blame and what sympathy it may call forth? Does no luminous cloud ever come between you and the severe truth as you know it in your own secret and clear-seeing soul? In a word, are you never tempted to make your characters more amiable than the Life, by the inclination to assimilate your thoughts to the thoughts of those who always *feel* kindly but sometimes fail to *see* justly?"

She is admirable on Jane Austen, as admirable in phrasing as in perception—at least to those who, while honouring Miss Austen for her delicacy and taste, stand well on this side of idolatry. Writing to G. H. Lewes, she says: "I had not seen *Pride and Prejudice* till I read that sentence of yours, and then I got the book. And what did I find? An accurate daguerreotyped portrait of a commonplace face; a carefully fenced, highly cultivated garden, with neat borders and delicate flowers; but no glance of a bright, vivid physiognomy, no open country, no fresh air, no blue hill, no bonny beck. I should hardly like to live with her ladies and gentlemen in their elegant but confined houses. . . . Miss Austen, being, as you say, without 'sentiment', without *poetry*, maybe is sensible, real (more *real* than *true*), but she cannot be great." How loaded with meanings is that "more *real* than *true*"! Even better is her letter to Mr. Williams. "I have likewise read one of Miss Austen's works—*Emma*—read it with interest and with just the degree of

admiration which Miss Austen herself would have thought sensible and suitable. Anything like warmth or enthusiasm—anything energetic, poignant, heart-felt is utterly out of place in commanding these works: all such demonstration the authoress would have met with a well-bred sneer, would have calmly scorned as outré and extravagant. She does her business of delineating the surface of the lives of genteel English people curiously well. There is a Chinese fidelity, a miniature delicacy in the painting. She ruffles her reader by nothing vehement, disturbs him by nothing profound. The passions are perfectly unknown to her; she rejects even a speaking acquaintance with that stormy sisterhood. Even to the feelings she vouchsafes no more than an occasional graceful but distant recognition—too frequent converse with them would ruffle the smooth elegance of her progress. Her business is not half so much with the human heart as with the human eyes, mouth, hands and feet. What sees keenly, speaks aptly, moves flexibly, it suits her to study; but what throbs fast and full, though hidden, what the blood rushes through, what is the unseen seat of life and the sentient target of death—this Miss Austen ignores. . . . If this is heresy, I cannot help it."

Yes, she is so right when the free and rebellious Charlotte is speaking; but alas Charlotte, as we are contending, was not a single soul but an ill-assorted team of two; the free artist had a partner, a puritan, a censor, a denier, a gentleman whose family name was Grundy; and this party lifts his voice very frequently to shout down his mate. Here, as before, his voice is early heard in a letter to Ellen. Dancing is the first and parent art; the leaping stem from which all the branches spring, and this is Charlotte on dancing when at the age of eighteen she was acting as that young lady's confessor and director. "It is allowed on all hands that the sin of dancing consists not in the mere action of shaking the shanks (as the Scotch say), but in the consequences that usually attend it—namely, frivolity and waste of time; when it is used only as in the case you state for the exercise and amusement of young people (who surely may without any breach of God's ordinance be allowed a little lightheartedness) these consequences cannot follow. Ergo . . . the amusement at such times is perfectly innocent."

And, again, as before, we hear the same note ringing twenty years later, in a letter to Mrs. Gaskell. "The sketch you give of your work (a story) . . . seems to me very noble; and its purpose may be as useful in practical result as it is high and just in theoretical tendency." We have seen how she, or rather the anguished moralist in her, condemned Rachel's art on puritan grounds, which is like trying to determine atmospheric pressure with a joiner's footrule. The same voice cries out, as in pain, at Thackeray's lecture—but here, of course, the outburst is tragically easy to understand. "Had I a brother yet living, I should tremble to let him read Thackeray's lecture on Fielding. I should hide it away from him. If, in spite of precaution, it should fall into his hands, I should earnestly pray him not to be misled by the voice of the charmer, let him charm never so wisely. Not that for a moment I would have had Thackeray to *abuse* Fielding, or even pharisaically to condemn his life; but I do most deeply grieve that it never entered into his heart sadly and nearly to feel the peril of such a career, that he might have dedicated some of his great strength to a potent warning against its adoption by any young man. I believe temptation often assails the finest manly natures, as the pecking sparrow or destructive wasp attacks the sweetest and mellowest fruit, eschewing what is sour and crude. The true lover of his race ought to devote his vigour to guard and protect; he should sweep away every lure with a kind of rage at its treachery." On Thackeray's women characters the feminist in her blinded the critic: "There is hardly any punishment he does not deserve for making Lady Castlewood peep through a keyhole, listen at a door, and be jealous of a boy and a milkmaid." And on Harriet Martineau's writings the devout evangelical in her worked the same mischief, "Who can trust the word, or rely upon the judgment, of an avowed atheist?"

It is astonishing. In one letter, to Mr. Smith, she can write: "I cannot write books handling the topics of the day; it is of no use trying. Nor can I write a book for its moral"; in another, to Mr. Williams, of a book called *The School for Fathers*, "I felt in reading the tale a wonderful hollowness in the moral and sentiment"; and in a third to the same critic: "You both of

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you dwell too much on what you regard as the *artistic* treatment of a subject. Say what you will, gentlemen—say it as ably as you will—truth is better than art."

Two voices are there; one is of the deep.
It learns the storm-cloud's thunderous melody. . . .
And one is of an old—

but abstain we from rudeness. Charlotte, both are thine.

The moralist with his baggage weighs down the flight of *Jane Eyre* when the wind is wrong; but he cannot break that sustained and resolute motion; the engine is too new and powerful. The book cleaves the sunlight to its chosen goal. The same passenger, his baggage greatly enlarged, brings *Shirley* crashing to earth a dozen times. *Shirley*, in fact, only comes into port on a wing and a prayer. You can learn much more of Charlotte from *Shirley* than from *Jane Eyre* because when writing it she felt she had an audience, a world-wide audience, and must appeal to it and lecture it and bring it up in the way it should go. Ever and again the book ceases to be a novel and becomes the next instalment of a serial homily.

It is Charlotte the born story-teller, Charlotte the free, when its criticism of the world is only implicit; it is Charlotte, the moralist, Charlotte the bound, when that judgment is loudly and lengthily declaimed. The book is heavy with her obsession about old maids; her dread lest she was predestined to become one of these; and her rancour at the world's treatment of them. One long chapter is entitled "Old Maids"; and in it the brooding Caroline Helstone mournfully avers: "I shall not be married, it appears. I suppose, as Robert does not care for me, I shall never have a husband to love, nor little children to take care of. Till lately I had reckoned securely on the duties and affections of wife and mother to occupy my existence. I considered, somehow, as a matter of course, that I was growing up to the ordinary destiny and never troubled myself to seek any other; but now I perceive plainly I may have been mistaken. Probably I shall be an old maid. . . ."

"Ah! I see," she pursued presently; "that is the question which most old maids are puzzled to solve. Other people solve

it for them by saying, "Your place is to do good to others, to be helpful whenever help is wanted." Is this enough? Is it to live? Is there not a terrible hollowness, mockery, want, craving, in that existence which is given away to others, for want of something of your own to bestow it on? I suspect there is. Does virtue lie in abnegation of self? I do not believe it. . . . Each human being has his share of rights. I suspect it would conduce to the happiness and welfare of all if each knew his allotment, and held to it as tenaciously as the martyr to his creed. Queer thoughts these that surge in my mind. Are they right thoughts? I am not certain.'"

This is not Caroline Helstone; she has faded out from the picture, leaving only thoughts; and they are the thoughts of Charlotte. This is the same hand that was writing at the same time to Mr. Williams: "Lonely as I am, how should I be if Providence had never given me courage to adopt a career—perseverance to plead through two long, weary years with publishers till they admitted me? How should I be with youth past, sisters lost, a resident in a moorland parish where there is not a single educated family? . . . As it is, something like a hope and motive sustains me still. I wish all your daughters—I wish every woman in England, had also a hope and motive. Alas! there are many old maids who have neither."

And at last, in Shirley, the moralist, striking the novelist aside, cries out in a passion of pain: "People hate to be reminded of ills they are unable or unwilling to remedy. Such reminder, in forcing on them a sense of their own incapacity, or a more painful sense of an obligation to make some unpleasant effort, troubles their ease and shakes their self-complacency. Old maids, like the houseless and unemployed poor, should not ask for a place and an occupation in the world; the demand disturbs the happy and rich—it disturbs parents. Look at the numerous families of girls in this neighbourhood—the Armitages, the Birtwhistles, the Sykeses. The brothers of these girls are every one in business or in professions; they have something to do. Their sisters have no earthly pleasure but an unprofitable visiting, and no hope, in all their life to come, of anything better. This stagnant state of things makes them decline in health. They are never well, and their minds and views shrink

to wondrous narrowness. The great wish, the sole aim of every one of them is to be married, but the majority will never marry; they will die as they now live. They scheme, they plot, they dress to ensnare husbands. The gentlemen turn them into ridicule; they hold them very cheap. . . . King of Israel! your model of a woman is a worthy model! But are we, in these days, brought up to be like her? Men of Yorkshire! do your daughters reach this royal standard? Can they reach it? Can you give them a field in which their faculties may be exercised and grow? Men of England! look at your poor girls, many of them fading around you, dropping off in consumption or decline; or, what is worse, degenerating to sour old maids—envious, back-biting, wretched, because life is a desert to them; or, what is worst of all, reduced to strive, by scarce modest coquetry and debasing artifice, to gain that position and consideration by marriage which to celibacy is denied. Fathers! cannot you alter these things? . . . You would wish to be proud of your daughters, and not to blush for them; then seek for them an interest and an occupation which shall raise them above the flirt, the manœuvrer, the mischief-making tale-bearer. Keep your girls' minds narrow and fettered; they will still be a plague and a care, sometimes a disgrace to you. Cultivate them—give them scope and work; they will be your gayest companions in health, your tenderest nurses in sickness, your most faithful prop in age."

This is not good fiction; it is not the incandescent narrative of *Jane Eyre*; but it is Charlotte as woman. It is not the work of a novelist whom we can admire and enjoy, but it is the cry of a woman we can salute. She has fought all her life for her two sisters, who died yesterday and need her help no more; so she fights now, from the same distant and narrow room, which is haunted by their presence, for her other sisters all over the world.

CHAPTER TWENTY-FIVE

SHE did not, of course, sit always in the room, writing, knitting, and dreaming. On the contrary she was less of a hermit after her sisters died than before. In the five years from June 1849 to June 1854 she went several times to London to stay with the Smiths; she visited Edinburgh with George Smith and his young brother; she made friends with the famous and stayed with Harriet Martineau at Ambleside, with Sir James and Lady Kay-Shuttleworth at Windermere, and with Mrs. Gaskell at Manchester. Whatever Charlotte the sister may have been suffering, Charlotte the novelist enjoyed triumphs that must have had some taste of sweetness.

Shirley was finished in August 1849 and published in October. As the successor of *Jane Eyre* it was reviewed at once in all the journals, and, with this fine wind behind it, sailed out to success. A second edition was called for almost immediately. Its success snatched away the "Curer Bell" disguise in which Charlotte had hidden herself and unveiled before an excited world the real author of *Jane Eyre*. Everyone in Yorkshire was reading *Shirley* because its scenes were set in their county, some of its characters were people they could recognise, and the civil riots which provided its drama were those that they or their fathers remembered; and a man of Haworth, then settled in Liverpool, perceiving that the Shirley curates were Haworth curates, deduced that the only possible author was the incumbent's daughter, Miss Brontë. He published his conjecture in the Liverpool papers, and this astounding and most piquant solution swept over Yorkshire; it swept into Haworth, invading every home there; it came up the lane and burst into the house of John Brown, the sexton, and into the parsonage itself.

In John Brown's house sat their lodger, Mr. Arthur Bell Nicholls, the curate, reading this book of Miss Brontë's; and as he read about the curates John Brown's wife heard him clapping and stamping on the floor and shouting with laughter. She feared

for a moment that he had gone wrong in the head. The book in his hand, he dashed across the lane to read the best parts of it to Mr. Brontë. The kitchen in the parsonage had received the news. "Martha came in yesterday, puffing and blowing and much excited. 'I've heard sich news,' she began. 'What about?' 'Please, ma'am, you've been and written two books—the grandest books that ever was seen. My father has heard it at Halifax, and Mr. G—— T—— and Mr. G—— and Mr. M—— at Bradford; and they are going to have a meeting at the Mechanics' Institute, and to settle about ordering them.' 'Hold your tongue, Martha, and be off.' " That was Charlotte's Yorkshire way of showing her delight and thanking Martha. "The Haworth people have been making great fools of themselves about *Shirley*. . . . It would be mere nonsense and vanity to tell you what they say." Yes, and it would uncover an exultation, and a gratitude to the great fools, that were near to tears.

Now began the pilgrimages to Haworth that have gone on for a hundred years. There were people in the lane staring up at the house. There were wanderers in the churchyard gazing surreptitiously over the garden wall. The congregation in the old barn-like church swelled most noticeably, for the worshippers were coming from all parts to sit under Mr. Brontë and look at his daughter. In those days two collections were taken in Haworth Old Church: one in the ordinary course of the service, and one at the door by John Brown, the sexton, as the strangers, coming and going, rewarded him for pointing out Miss Brontë. This latter seems to have been a silver collection.

No doubt Mr. Brown appreciated to the full this proud and profitable development, but his pleasure in Miss Brontë's fame was but a pale wine compared with the rich, red cup her father was drinking. The old man drank deep of Charlotte's success as only a parent can. It excited him, we may safely assert, as much as, and perhaps more than, it excited her. All the ambitions of that far-away lad in Ireland, that young man in Cambridge long ago, that closeted and labouring young poet in Hartshead and Thornton in the days when Maria was alive—all had found a sudden and late fulfilment in his daughter Charlotte. He collected and preserved every notice of her

novels and every mention of her in the papers. He spoke to his acquaintances in the neighbourhood, and wrote to his family in Ireland, of "my daughter's novels", "my daughter's publishers", and "my daughter's friends". On the walls of the parsonage you may see many water colours, wash drawings, and pencil sketches; and beneath them is written in the tremulous hand of a rather blind old man, "By my daughter Charlotte, P. Brontë, Minr." He revelled in the books which came in parcels from Cornhill; he sat down in pride to the grouse sent by Lord John Manners, which probably tasted the better for having this title attached to it, and he relished in the quiet of his room the resonant titles with which Charlotte was associating in London. When the great, in the persons of Sir James Kay-Shuttleworth and Lady Kay-Shuttleworth, came to the parsonage and invited Charlotte to their magnificent and castellated mansion, Gawthorpe Hall, he drove her forth to her duty, as we have told. He would stand no nonsense at all. She must pluck all the fruits of her celebrity. He dreamed for her a marriage that was to be socially and financially splendid. He was impatient for her next novel to come out and goaded her on. "The fact is, what goads and tortures me is not any anxiety of my own to publish another book, to have my name before the public, to get cash, etc., but a haunting fear that my dilatoriness disappoints others. Now the 'others' whose wish on the subject I really care for, reduces itself to my father and Cornhill, and since Cornhill ungrudgingly counsels me to take my own time, I think I can pacify such impatience as my dear father naturally feels." Bless him in his hour of victory. Can we not be glad that he had this triumph at the end?

In November 1849 Charlotte went to London to stay with the Smiths. This was a very different visit from the quaking appearance of Charlotte and Anne in the previous year. It was much more what a conqueror's visit should be. She stayed as an honoured guest at 4 Westbourne Place, and there in the "very grand" drawing-room (above the grocer's) Mr. Smith gathered the celebrities to meet her. Here she first met Thackeray. We have something about that meeting from both the persons who then shook hands. "Brief as my visit to

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London was," writes Charlotte to Mr. Williams, "it must for me be memorable. I sometimes fancied myself in a dream—I could scarcely credit the reality of what passed. . . . When Mr. Thackeray was announced, and I saw him enter, looked up at his tall figure, heard his voice, the whole incident was truly dream-like, I was only certain it was true because I became miserably destitute of self-possession. *Amour propre* suffers terribly under such circumstances: woe to him that thinks of himself in the presence of intellectual greatness! Had I not been obliged to speak, I could have managed well, but it behoved me to answer when addressed, and the effort was torture—I spoke stupidly."

And after her death Thackeray wrote, "I can only say of this lady, *vidi tantum*. I saw her first just as I rose out of an illness from which I had never thought to recover. I remember the trembling little frame, the little hand, the great honest eyes. An impetuous honesty seemed to characterise the woman. . . . I fancied an austere little Joan of Arc marching in upon us, and rebuking our easy lives, our easy morals. . . . Who that has known her books has not admired the artist's noble English, the burning love of truth, the bravery, the simplicity, the indignation at wrong, the eager sympathy, the pious love and reverence, the passionate honour, so to speak, of the woman? What a story is that of the family of poets in their solitude yonder on the gloomy Yorkshire moors!"

During this visit too she met Harriet Martineau for the first time. The meeting came about in this fashion. Currer Bell, before his identity was disclosed, had sent a copy of *Shirley* to Miss Martineau in gratitude for much profit and pleasure received from her works. (This was before Miss Martineau revealed herself as an atheist.) Miss Martineau did not know whether Currer Bell was a man or a woman, but, being a shrewd lady and having suspicions, she split the difference and addressed her letter of thanks to "Currer Bell, Esq." and began it "Dear Madam".

When Charlotte in Westbourne Place learned from Mr. Smith that the house from which Miss Martineau had written was only a little distance away she was much excited and wrote at once to ask if she might be allowed to come and

call on her; conceiving of herself as the small and humble writer and Harriet Martineau as the great and famous one. Harriet Martineau, assessing Currer Bell's value somewhat differently, immediately invited him, or her, to tea on the Sunday afternoon and assembled some friends to meet the celebrity. Whether Harriet had yet confirmed her guess that "Currer Bell" was a woman I do not know—I daresay she had, and was keeping silence for the fun of it—but certainly none of her visitors that afternoon knew the truth. Just before Charlotte arrived a very tall gentleman entered, and all the people in the room wondered if this were Currer Bell. But it was not; he gave another name. And then the footman announced, "Miss Brogden," Charlotte probably having spoken so low and timidly that he could not catch the real name; and into the room came, in Miss Martineau's words, "the smallest creature I had ever seen except at a fair". This little person was dressed all in black (it was not seven months since Anne had died), but the swift keen feminine eyes of the hostess noted at once the neatness of the dress ("neat as a Quaker's"), the beautiful brown hair, the great blazing eyes and the "sensible face indicating a habit of self-control". Taken aback to see so many people in the room, the little newcomer hesitated at the door and then went straight forward to her hostess almost as if she were a child seeking support and shelter. When her diffidence had melted a little she talked to the company about Haworth and the parsonage and her daily life there; till Harriet Martineau, that powerful, self-sufficient, indefatigable, dictatorial, and excellent woman, felt heartily eager to cry.

She visited London again in May of the next year, staying as always with the Smiths. They had moved in the meantime from 4 Westbourne Place to a larger house in Gloucester Terrace just round the corner. It was then numbered 76, but the number was changed almost immediately to 112. Now this house is of interest because within its walls there began to appear, to peep above ground, something that might have been a love-affair between Charlotte and her young publisher; and because in *Villette* she conveyed the whole house, as on the carpet of an Arabian jinnee, with Mrs. Smith and her son inside it, to the

outskirts of Brussels, transmogrifying it on the journey into a château or manoir and calling it La Terrasse (an echo of Gloucester Terrace?) and its occupants Mrs. Bretton and Graham Bretton. Within that house, La Terrasse, she staged the unfulfilled love of Lucy Snowe for Graham Bretton, or "Dr. John".

There is no doubt about the identification of the Brettons with the Smiths since it was more or less openly admitted by Charlotte, and by George Smith also, who was not too pleased about it. Nor need we doubt the incipient but never full-grown love-affair. Ellen Nussey, Charlotte's confidante, knew a good deal about it, and always maintained that it developed as far as a proposal. And we have a letter to Ellen which shows that Charlotte had considered the marriage and rejected it, not without sadness, because she was eight years older than he, occupied a much humbler position in the world, and could not make herself believe that their liking and admiration for each other were justification enough for so hazardous a union. "Your last letter but one, dear Ellen, made me smile. I think the undercurrent simply amounts to this—a kind of natural liking and sense of something congenial. Were there no vast barrier of fortune, etc., there is perhaps enough of personal regard to make things possible which are now impossible. If men and women married because they liked each other's temper, look, conversation, nature, and so on, the chance you allude to might be admitted as a chance, but other reasons regulate matrimony, reasons of convenience, of connection, of money. Meanwhile I am content to have him a friend and pray God to continue to me the common sense to look on one so young, so rising, so hopeful, in no other light."

This is Charlotte at her best; and the same note sounds again when she is speaking of *Villette*. "Lucy must not marry Dr. John: he is far too youthful, handsome, bright spirited, and sweet-tempered; he is a 'curled darling' of nature and of fortune, and must draw a prize in life's lottery. His wife must be young, rich, pretty; he must be made very happy indeed." So in *Villette* she gave Dr. John to Paulina de Bassompierre and in real life George Smith to a Miss Elizabeth Blakeway, whom he married in 1854.

Because of this half-hidden tale and because another offer of marriage was probably made to Charlotte in this house, I was at pains to identify it. As in the matter of Westbourne Place, the Librarian of Paddington, with all his learned staff, has most ably abetted me, and I have before me a letter in which he states: "It appears that on 7th June, 1894, Gloucester Terrace was renumbered. . . . No. 112 became No. 103. . . . No. 103 is still standing but is empty and in a very sad state of dilapidation."

So it is 103, and there it stands, its stucco flaking, its balusters broken, its windows opaque with grime, and rubble in its area. Some of its neighbouring houses have been gutted and shattered in the late raids; a few have disappeared as if wafted away, leaving only the air behind them. The door of No. 103 is padlocked against the stray intruder; and it stands there blinded by the dirt on its windows, empty except for its ghosts. Stand before it; roll up like a story yet to be told the hundred years that have passed since 1850; part like curtains the brown grime from the windows; and you may see Charlotte in that drawing-room on the first floor meeting G. H. Lewes for the first time or dining opposite him in the room below. It is eighteen months since Emily died and Charlotte is seeing the face of her sister everywhere. As she sits opposite him she studies his face. "The aspect of Lewes's face almost moves me to tears; it is so wonderfully like Emily, her eyes, her features, the very nose, the somewhat prominent mouth, the forehead, even, at times, the expression." In the same drawing-room she is probably being introduced by her publisher and his mother to George Richmond, the artist, who, commissioned by Mr. Smith, is to draw the famous crayon portrait of her which now hangs in the National Portrait Gallery. One day, her session in his studio completed, she stood behind him, watching as he continued drawing; and suddenly he heard a sob and swung round to learn what it meant. "Excuse me," she said; "it is so like my sister Emily."

The portrait was to be a gift from Mr. Smith to Mr. Brontë, and in time it arrived at the parsonage together with a fine framed portrait of the Duke of Wellington, Charlotte's hero—how George Smith's gay generosity recalls Willy Weightman,

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now sleeping beneath the north aisle. The two pictures were shown to Tabby, who stoutly asserted that the artist hadn't done anything like justice to her young lady but that the other portrait was the living image of the master.

You may see Charlotte too leaving that threshold for the famous and ghastly party which Thackeray gave for her at his house in Young Street, Kensington. Leaving Gloucester Terrace and crossing the park, you may go and look at that low, bow-fronted house in Young Street, behind the great white cliffs of John Barker's, and consider the acute embarrassments, the sickening discomforts, that were suffered there one warm evening in the summer of 1850. The story has been told so well by Thackeray's daughter, Lady Anne Ritchie, in her *Chapters from Some Memories* that I cannot bring myself to dim her bright narrative, or drain the living blood from it, by compressing it into a paraphrase. I quote it in full.

"One of the most notable persons who ever came into our bow-windowed drawing-room in Young Street is a guest never to be forgotten by me—a tiny, delicate little person, whose small hand nevertheless grasped a mighty lever which set all the literary world of that day vibrating. I can still see the scene quite plainly—the hot summer evening, the open windows, the carriage driving to the door as we all sat silent and expectant; my father, who rarely waited, waiting with us; our governess and my sister and I all in a row, and prepared for the great event. We saw the carriage stop, and out of it sprang the active well-knit figure of Mr. George Smith, who was bringing Miss Brontë to see our father. My father, who had been walking up and down the room, goes out into the hall to meet his guests, and then, after a moment's delay, the door opens wide, and the two gentlemen come in, leading a tiny, delicate, serious little lady, pale, with fair straight hair, and steady eyes. She may be a little over thirty; she is dressed in a little *barège* dress, with a pattern of faint green moss. She enters in mittens, in silence, in seriousness; our hearts are beating with wild excitement. This, then, is the authoress, the unknown power whose books have set all London talking, reading, speculating; some people even say our father wrote the books—the wonderful books. To say that we little girls had been given *Jane Eyre* to read scarcely repre-

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sents the facts of the case; to say that we had taken it without leave, read bits here and read bits there, been carried away by an undreamed-of and hitherto unimagined whirlwind into things, times, places, all utterly absorbing, and at the same time absolutely unintelligible to us, would more accurately describe our state of mind on that summer evening as we look at Jane Eyre—the great Jane Eyre—the tiny little lady. The moment is so breathless that dinner comes as a relief to the solemnity of the occasion, and we all smile as my father stoops to offer his arm; for, though genius she may be, Miss Brontë can barely reach his elbow. My own personal impressions are that she is somewhat grave and stern, especially to forward little girls who wish to chatter. Mr. George Smith has since told me how she afterwards remarked upon my father's wonderful forbearance and gentleness with our uncalled-for incursions into the conversation. She sat gazing at him with kindling eyes of interest, lighting up with a sort of illumination every now and then as she answered him. I can see her bending forward over the table, not eating, but listening to what he said as he carved the dish before him.

"I think it must have been on this very occasion that my father invited some of his friends in the evening to meet Miss Brontë—for everybody was interested and anxious to see her. Mrs. Crowe, the reciter of ghost-stories, was there. Mrs. Brookfield, Mrs. Carlyle, Mr. Carlyle himself was present, so I am told, railing at the appearance of cockneys upon Scotch mountain sides; there were also too many Americans for his taste, 'but the Americans were as gods compared to the cockneys', says the philosopher. Besides the Carlyles, there were Mrs. Elliott and Miss Perry, Mrs. Procter and her daughter, most of my father's habitual friends and companions. . . . It was a gloomy and a silent evening. Everyone waited for the brilliant conversation which never began at all. Miss Brontë retired to the sofa in the study, and murmured a low word now and then to our kind governess, Miss Truelock. The room looked very dark, the lamp began to smoke a little, the conversation grew dimmer and more dim, the ladies sat round still expectant, my father was too much perturbed by the gloom and the silence to be able to cope with it at all. Mrs. Brookfield, who was

in the doorway by the study, near the corner in which Miss Brontë was sitting, leant forward with a little commonplace, since brilliance was not to be the order of the evening. 'Do you like London, Miss Brontë?' she said; another silence, a pause, then Miss Brontë answers, 'Yes and no,' very gravely. Mrs. Brookfield has herself reported the conversation. My sister and I were much too young to be bored in those days; alarmed, impressed we might be, but not yet bored. A party was a party, a lioness was a lioness; and—shall I confess it?—at that time an extra dish of biscuits was enough to mark the evening. We felt all the importance of the occasion: tea spread in the dining-room, ladies in the drawing-room. We roamed about inconveniently, no doubt, and excitedly, and in one of my incursions crossing the hall, after Miss Brontë had left, I was surprised to see my father opening the front door with his hat on. He put his fingers to his lips, walked out into the darkness, and shut the door quietly behind him. When I went back to the drawing-room again, the ladies asked me where he was. I vaguely answered that I thought he was coming back. I was puzzled at the time, nor was it all made clear to me till long years afterwards, when one day Mrs. Procter asked me if I knew what had happened once when my father had invited a party to meet Jane Eyre at his house. It was one of the dullest evenings she had ever spent in her life, she said. And then with a good deal of humour she described the situation—the ladies who had all come expecting so much delightful conversation, and the gloom and the constraint, and how, finally, overwhelmed by the situation, my father had quietly left the room, left the house, and gone off to his club."

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In the summer of the next year, 1851, while staying again at Gloucester Terrace, the little ex-governess, the poor household retainer of the Sidgwicks who was instructed to walk behind the Master when he took his children and his dog for a walk, the timid, undersized, and self-deprecating daughter of the parsonage, enjoyed a moment of triumph among the most

brilliant society of the capital. Society made way for her, and bowed as she passed. The behaviour of the lords and ladies and fashionable gentry on this occasion stung Mrs. Gaskell to a murmur of disapproval. "Surely such thoughtless manifestation of curiosity is a blot on the scutcheon of true politeness," she wrote in sorrow and some anger. But I rejoice to write of it. I wish Mr. Brontë could have seen it. I wish Emily and Anne could have seen it. And I am sure that while it shook the nerves of Charlotte, it lodged a little seed of gratification in her heart.

With a lady for companion she went to hear the second of Thackeray's lectures at Willis's Rooms. From two of her letters I assemble her description of the scene. "On Thursday afternoon I went to hear the lecture. It was delivered in a large and splendid kind of saloon—that in which the great balls of Almacks are given. The walls were all painted and gilded, the benches were sofas stuffed and cushioned and covered with blue damask. The audience was composed of the *élite* of London society. Duchesses were there by the score, and amongst them the great and beautiful Duchess of Sutherland, the Queen's Mistress of the Robes. . . . I did not at all expect the great lecturer would know me or notice me under these circumstances, with admiring duchesses and countesses seated in rows before him; but he met me as I entered—shook hands—took me to his mother whom I had not seen before and introduced me. She is a fine, handsome, young-looking old lady. . . . Thackeray just got up and spoke with as much simplicity and ease as if he had been speaking to a few friends by his own fireside. The lecture was truly good: he had taken pains with its composition. It was finished without being in the least studied; a quiet humour and graphic force enlivened it throughout. . . .

"After the lecture somebody came up behind me, leaned over the bench and said, 'Will you permit me, as a Yorkshireman, to introduce myself to you?' I turned round, was puzzled at first by the strange face I met, but in a minute I recognised the features. 'You are the Earl of Carlisle,' I said. He smiled and assented. He went on to talk for some time in a courteous, kind fashion. He asked after you" (Mr. Brontë), "recalled the platform electioneering scene at Haworth, and begged to be remem-

bered to you. Dr. Forbes came up afterwards, and Mr. Monckton Milnes, a Yorkshire Member of Parliament, who introduced himself on the same plea as Lord Carlisle."

Significantly she omits from this account the three incidents which vested her in a robe of distinction; for them we are indebted to her shadowy companion. First, Thackeray, after welcoming her and presenting her to his mother, walked among his friends and pointed her out to them, so that many faces were turned in her direction and glasses lifted to curious and interested eyes. Charlotte, shivering from this inspection, whispered to her friend, "I'm afraid Mr. Thackeray has been playing me a trick," and was glad when the lecturer, now on the platform, drew all the eyes to himself and held them. Then, the lecture over, he came straight from the platform to Charlotte and asked her how she liked it, just as Paul Emmanuel is represented as doing in *Villette*. "Qu'en dites vous?" This cast the eyes upon her again and most of the brilliant audience stood halted about the room, or near the door, watching. And lastly, when Charlotte and her companion began to walk from the room, all the waiting people formed themselves into two rows for her to pass between them. Their motive was to see her close at hand, but the effect was to elevate her into the most exalted person present, who must be given precedence over all. As a young girl Charlotte had longed for the brilliance of London; she had dreamed of visiting its splendid halls and seeing from a distance its famous men and its great ladies; and now, trembling and so white that her companion feared she was going to faint, she passed, in this gilded chamber, along the royal avenue which the capital had made for her.

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And in these last, crowned years Charlotte the woman had her triumphs as well as Charlotte the writer. And it is likely that it was a richer compensation, a profounder healing, to her who had always thought of herself as ugly, unattractive, and foredoomed to spinsterhood when she found herself desired as a woman rather than as a novelist. Besides George Smith's

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proposal of marriage, if it was really made, there was another proposal from another member of his firm. This is a curious story whose details are only to be inferred from letters to Ellen.

Mr. James Taylor is easy to picture because Charlotte has limned his features for us with a very vivacious pen. He was short, thickset, red-haired, and bearded; and "the resemblance to Branwell struck me forcibly—it is marked. He is not ugly but very peculiar; the lines in his face show an inflexibility and, I must add, a hardness of character which do not attract. As he stood near me, as he looked at me in his keen way, it was all I could do to stand my ground tranquilly and steadily, and not to recoil as before. It is no good saying anything if I am not candid. I avow then, that on this occasion, predisposed as I was to regard him favourably, his manners and his personal presence scarcely pleased me more than at the first interview." He had "a determined, dreadful nose in the middle of his face which when poked into my countenance cuts into my soul like iron. Still he is horribly intelligent, quick, searching, sagacious, and with a memory of relentless tenacity. To turn to Williams after him or to Smith himself is to turn from granite to easy down or warm fur."

In his character as reader, or editor, for the firm of Smith, Elder & Co., he had read the early parts of *Shirley* in the spring of 1849; and in the autumn, returning through Yorkshire from a holiday, he came to Haworth to get the completed manuscript and take it to Cornhill. In the winter of that year, during Charlotte's first stay at 112 Gloucester Terrace, he met her again, and we infer that he proposed to her at this time and was rejected, since nine months later Charlotte wrote in a letter to Ellen: "Mr. Taylor (the little man) first informed me of this article"—an article on *Currer Bell* in the *Palladium*. "I was somewhat surprised to receive his letter, having concluded nine months ago that there would be no more correspondence from that quarter. I enclose you a note from him received subsequently, in answer to my acknowledgment. Read it and tell me exactly how it impresses you regarding the writer's character, etc. His little newspaper disappeared for some weeks, and I thought it was gone to the tomb of the

Capulets; however it has reappeared, with an explanation that he had feared its regular transmission might rather annoy than gratify. . . . This little Taylor is deficient neither in spirit nor in sense."

And now it would seem that the little man, a determined little man, encouraged by this slight change in the temperature, returned to his assault, for in January we have Charlotte writing, "You are to say no more about 'Jupiter' and 'Venus'—what do you mean by such heathen trash?"—this is an allusion to some archness from Ellen on the subject of George Smith. "The fact is, no fallacy can be wilder, and I won't have it hinted at even in jest, because my common sense laughs it to scorn. The idea of the 'little man' shocks me less—it would be a more likely match if 'matches' were at all in question, which *they are not*. He still sends his little newspaper; and the other day there came a letter of a bulk, volume, pith, judgment, and knowledge, worthy to have been the product of a giant. You may laugh as much and as wickedly as you please; but the fact is, there is a quiet constancy about this, my diminutive and red-haired friend, which adds a foot to his stature, turns his sandy locks dark, and altogether dignifies him a good deal in my estimation."

Nobody can say what might have happened after this if Mr. Taylor had not been sent almost directly to Bombay to open a branch of the publishing house in that city. In April he came to say good-bye to the lady he had courted and who was not, he could believe, wholly indifferent to him. That there was emotion on both sides, poorly concealed, in this farewell interview, and that Charlotte, after it, was left uneasily wondering if she had been wise to let him go, we can gather from the undertone of doubt and disappointment in the letters which she wrote at once, and throughout that month, to Ellen.

"April 5th, 1851. DEAR ELLEN—Mr. Taylor has been and is gone; things are just as they were. . . . He gave me a book at parting, requesting in his brief way that I would keep it for his sake, and adding hastily, 'I shall hope to hear from you in India—your letters *have* been and *will* be a greater refreshment than you can think or I can tell.' And so

he is gone; and stern and abrupt little man as he is—too often jarring as are his manners—his absence and the exclusion of his idea from my mind leave me certainly with less support and in deeper solitude than before. You see, dear Nell, though we are still precisely on the same level—you are not isolated. I feel that there is a certain mystery about this transaction yet, and whether it will ever be cleared up to me I do not know; however, my plain duty is to wean my mind from the subject, and if possible to avoid pondering over it. In his conversation he seemed studiously to avoid reference to Mr. Smith individually, speaking always of the 'house'—the 'firm'. He seemed throughout quite as excited and nervous as when I first saw him. I feel that in his way he has a regard for me—a regard which I cannot bring myself entirely to reciprocate in kind, and yet its withdrawal leaves a painful blank."

"April 9th, 1851. . . . Certainly I shall not soon forget last Friday, and *never*, I think, the evening and night succeeding that morning and afternoon. . . . You speak to me in soft consoling accents, but I hold far sterner language to myself, dear Nell. An absence of five years—a dividing expanse of three oceans—the wide difference between a man's active career and a woman's passive existence—these things are almost equivalent to an eternal separation. But there is another thing which forms a barrier more difficult to pass than any of these. Would Mr. Taylor and I ever suit? Could I ever feel for him enough love to accept him as a husband? Friendship—gratitude—esteem I have, but each moment he came near me, and that I could see his eyes fastened on me, my veins ran ice. Now that he is away I feel far more gently towards him; it is only close by that I grow rigid—stiffening with a strange mixture of apprehension and anger, which nothing softens but his retreat and a perfect subduing of his manner. I did not want to be proud, nor intend to be proud, but I was forced to be so."

"April 23rd, 1851. MY DEAR ELLEN—I have heard from Mr. Taylor to-day—a quiet little note. He returned to London a week since on Saturday; he has since kindly chosen and sent me a parcel of books. He leaves England May 20th. His note concludes with asking whether he has any chance of seeing me

in London before that time. I must tell him that I have already fixed June for my visit, and therefore, in all human probability, we shall see each other no more. There is still a want of plain mutual understanding in this business, and there is sadness and pain in more ways than one. . . . I am sure he has estimable and sterling qualities; but with every disposition and with every wish, with every intention even to look on him in the most favourable point of view at his last visit, it was impossible to me in my inward heart to think of him as one that might one day be acceptable as a husband. It would sound harsh were I to tell even *you* of the estimate I felt compelled to form respecting him. Dear Nell, I looked for something of the gentleman—something I mean of the *natural* gentleman; you know I can dispense with acquired polish, and for looks, I know myself too well to think that I have any right to be exacting on that point. I could not find one gleam, I could not see one passing glimpse of true good-breeding. It is hard to say, but it is true. In mind too, though clever, he is second-rate—thoroughly second-rate. One does not like to say these things, but one had better be honest. Were I to marry him my heart would bleed in pain and humiliation; I could not, *could* not look up to him. No; if Mr. Taylor be the only husband fate offers to me, single I must always remain. But yet, at times I grieve for him, and perhaps it is superfluous, for I cannot think he will suffer much: a hard nature, occupation, and change of scene will befriend him. With kind regards to all—I am, dear Nell, your middle-aged friend. . . . Write soon."

How completely the conflict in her heart is shown by those final words, "Your middle-aged friend."

§

So Charlotte, loving neither George Smith nor James Taylor as she longed to love someone, let them go and gave herself again to her dream-lover, M. Heger. That is to say she gave herself to the writing of the Paul Emmanuel Chapters in *Villette*. Her disappointments and the unfulfilled longing charged her with power, and the power lies to this day on those pages. Although

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Villette is a more uneven work than *Jane Eyre* these are some of the best pages she ever wrote. After Mr. Taylor was gone, and after her visit that summer to London, she was absorbed in *Villette*. She completed it in November. And its third and concluding volume was hardly finished and delivered to the publishers before she became the heroine of a love story, set in the parsonage and the church lane and the Haworth fields, such as might have been written in part by herself in realistic and unsanguine mood, and in part by Meredith when the Comic Spirit was driving his hand.

CHAPTER TWENTY-SIX

ACROSS the lane, in the little house against the school, lodged Mr. Arthur Bell Nicholls, the curate, with John Brown, the sexton, and his wife. Mr. Brontë had been granted an assistant in 1839, and Mr. Nicholls was the fourth curate to serve under him at Haworth church. This is the apostolic succession: first came Willy Weightman, whose memory lingers so pleasantly with us; then, Mr. Weightman having sought his last couch beneath the north aisle, a Mr. James William Smith, from Dublin University, succeeded him and worked for two years at Haworth, during which time Charlotte, greatly disliking him, absorbed enough of his unpleasantness to project him later as the preposterous Irish curate in *Shirley*, Peter Augustus Malone; then, for a while, Mr. Smith being on holiday in Ireland, Mr. Joseph Brett Grant, Master of Haworth Grammar School, did occasional duty in the parish, and Charlotte, finding much amiss in him, turned him into Mr. Donne, another of the ludicrous *Shirley* curates; then, Mr. Smith having left to take up a curacy in Keighley, Mr. Arthur Bell Nicholls came up the hill and sat down in the empty place.

“Papa has got a new curate lately, a Mr. Nicholls from Ireland,” Charlotte wrote at the time. “He appears a respectable young man, and I hope will give satisfaction.” Though born of Scotch parents, he was a native of County Antrim in Ireland, a graduate of Trinity, Dublin, and regarded by all as an Irishman. Mr. Brontë liked having his compatriots about him. It was in 1845 that he came, and he gave satisfaction enough to remain there till the time at which we have arrived, 1852. That he could have been for seven years in the house across the way, or in the church below, or in the village streets, or in Mr. Brontë’s study, and so far have been noticed but twice in our story—once when he passed the window and once when we heard him clapping and stamping with delight as he read *Shirley*—is evidence enough that, unlike Mr. Weightman, who broke into the narrative like a summer gale, he was a quiet, conscientious, unimpressive,

unobtrusive, reserved and even taciturn man. A portrait of him dated 1854 shows a handsome and normally unsmiling, frock-coated minister, with luxuriant black hair, small eyes, deep upper lip, and a curtain-fringe of black beard under his chin. Charlotte had no great opinion of him. Soon after his arrival she wrote to Ellen, who rather admired him, "I cannot for my life see those interesting germs of goodness in him you discovered, his narrowness of mind strikes me chiefly." And some two years later we have her writing to the same chronic matchmaker: "Who gravely asked you whether Miss Brontë was not going to be married to her papa's curate? I scarcely need say that never was rumour more unfounded. A cold, far-away sort of civility are the only terms on which I have ever been with Mr. Nicholls. I could by no means think of mentioning such a rumour to him even as a joke. It would make me the laughing-stock of himself and his fellow curates for half a year to come. They regard me as an old maid, and I regard them, one and all, as highly uninteresting, narrow, and unattractive specimens of the coarser sex."

Nevertheless she respected him enough to use him in *Shirley*, and under the name of Macarthey, as a contrast to the other Irish curate, Peter Augustus Malone. "Perhaps I ought to remark that on the premature and sudden vanishing of Mr. Malone from the stage of Briarfield parish . . . there came as his successor another Irish curate, Mr. Macarthey. I am happy to be able to inform you, *with truth*, that this gentleman did as much credit to his country as Malone had done it discredit. He proved himself as decent, decorous, and conscientious as Peter was rampant, boisterous, and _____. This last epithet I choose to suppress, because it would let the cat out of the bag. He laboured faithfully in the parish. The schools, both Sunday and day schools, flourished under his sway like green bay trees. Being human, of course, he had his faults. These, however, were proper, steady-going, clerical faults—what many would call virtues. The circumstance of finding himself invited to tea with a Dissenter would unhinge him for a week. The spectacle of a Quaker wearing his hat in the church, the thought of an unbaptized fellow-creature being interred with Christian rites—these things could make strange havoc in Mr. Macarthey's

physical and mental economy. Otherwise he was sane and rational, diligent and charitable."

This passage very naturally pleased Mr. Nicholls as he read it in his lodging across the lane; and it was the opinion of the village for ever afterwards that it "gave him ideas". But it may be that his admiration for his vicar's celebrated daughter had been trembling into love long before this: we cannot know, for of all the characters in this tale of the Brontës there is none so slow-moving, none more self-contained, none more silent.

A delayed-action bomb makes no louder an explosion than one which bursts on impact, but its effect, since it is unforeseen, and comes out of a silence, can be more shattering to the nerves and unbracing to the sinews. Charlotte had remarked certain "indications" in Mr. Nicholls which she "scarce ventured to interpret"; Mr. Brontë had "minutely noticed all Mr. Nicholls' low spirits, all his threats of expatriation"—that is, a threat to go to Australia—"all his symptoms of impaired health—noticed them with little sympathy and much indirect sarcasm"; but neither was prepared for what happened one December night, and the emotional devastation and overthrow were, in the exact sense, terrific. No one in the parsonage but was rocked, split, dismantled, and, temporarily at least, in a dangerous state.

"On Monday evening Mr. Nicholls was here to tea. I vaguely felt without clearly seeing, as without seeing I have felt for some time, the meaning of his constant looks, and strange, feverish restraint. After tea I withdrew to the dining-room as usual. As usual, Mr. Nicholls sat with Papa till between eight and nine o'clock; I then heard him open the parlour door as if going. I expected the clash of the front door. He stopped in the passage; he tapped; like lightning it flashed on me what was coming. He entered; he stood before me." The novelist is as inspired by the drama as the woman is shaken by it; and naturally, since she is telling the tale to that splendid audience, Ellen. "What his words were you can guess; his manner you can hardly realise, nor can I forget it. Shaking from head to foot, looking deadly pale, speaking low, vehemently, yet with difficulty, he made me for the first time feel what it costs a

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man to declare affection where he doubts response. The spectacle of one ordinarily so statue-like thus trembling, stirred, and overcome, gave me a kind of strange shock. He spoke of sufferings he had borne for months, of sufferings he could endure no longer, and craved for some hope. I could only entreat him to leave me then and promise a reply on the morrow. I asked him if he had spoken to Papa. He said he dared not. I think I half led, half put him out of the room."

When he was gone she went across the passage to Papa in his study and told him all. The reader will allow that I have defended Mr. Brontë, not without some warmth of feeling, through nearly three hundred pages; but at this point my arm falls to my side, disabled. I cannot lift the leaden limb; I can only watch, agape. From now on, and throughout this affair of Mr. Nicholls' courtship, the Rev. Mr. Brontë really did behave shamefully. My only word in mitigation, before I sink into silence, shall be that he was now seventy-five, dyspeptic, and filled with dreams of a glorious marriage for his famous daughter.

When she told him what Mr. Nicholls had said and besought, the veins on his temples started up like whiccord, his eyes became bloodshot, and he said terrible things. He said that the match would be a degradation; that Mr. Nicholls was but a beggarly curate with a hundred per annum; that he had behaved deceitfully and disingenuously; and that his daughter would be throwing herself away on such a man. He spoke in such language that Charlotte wrote, "If I had *loved* Mr. Nicholls, and had heard such epithets applied to him as were used, it would have transported me past my patience; as it was my blood boiled with a sense of injustice." But he had worked himself up into a state that was not to be trifled with or argued with, and Charlotte, to save his brain, or even his life, "made haste to promise that Mr. Nicholls should on the morrow have a distinct refusal".

Three days later. "You ask how Papa demeans himself to Mr. Nicholls. I only wish you were here to see Papa in his present mood: you would know something of him. He just treats him with a hardness not to be bent, and a contempt not to be propitiated. The two have had no interview as yet; all

has been done by letter. Papa wrote, I must say, a most cruel note to Mr. Nicholls on Wednesday. In his state of mind and health (for the poor man is horrifying his landlady, Martha's mother, by entirely rejecting his meals) I felt that the blow must be parried, and I thought it right to accompany the pitiless despatch by a line to the effect that, while Mr. Nicholls must never expect me to reciprocate the feeling he had expressed, yet, at the same time, I wished to disclaim participation in sentiments calculated to give him pain; and I exhorted him to maintain his courage and spirits. On receiving the two letters, he set off from home. Yesterday came the inclosed brief epistle. . . . How are you getting on, dear Nell, and how are all at Brookroyd? Remember me kindly to everybody—Yours, wishing devoutly that Papa would resume his tranquillity, and Mr. Nicholls his beef and pudding, C. BRONTË.

- "I am glad to say that the incipient inflammation in Papa's eye is disappearing."

On receiving the pitiless despatch Mr. Nicholls immediately went from Haworth and left Mr. Brontë to do the work of his own parish. But, perhaps thinking better of this, for he was a man of conscience, he returned in a week and wrote asking permission to withdraw his resignation. Mr. Brontë, unvisited yet by conscience, his door still bolted against it, replied that Mr. Nicholls should do so only if he gave a written promise never to broach the "obnoxious subject" again. Mr. Nicholls gave no such promise, but remained, discharging his duties in the parish but declining to come near the church, lest, I suppose, he should meet his Vicar in the vestry or see Charlotte in her pew. He provided a substitute for the services, and Mr. Brontë preached twice every Sunday on Christianity.

The whole parish must now have been in possession of the story and the scandal. Charlotte says: "Nobody pities him but me. Martha is bitter against him; John Brown says he should like to shoot him. . . . Dear Nell, without loving him, I don't like to think of him suffering in solitude, and wish him anywhere so that he were happier. He and Papa have never met or spoken yet."

In the midst of this parochial hubbub up in a little Yorkshire hill-town, *Villette* was published two hundred miles away in

London. The novel "was received with one burst of acclamation". George Eliot wrote: "I am only just returned to a sense of the real world about me, for I have been reading *Villette*. There is something almost preternatural in its power. *Villette* . . . *Villette* . . . have you read it?" Nevertheless there were a few dissentient voices behind the chorus of praise, and one was Harriet Martineau's. Charlotte had written to her asking for a frank criticism of the book. "I know that you will give me your thoughts upon my book as frankly as if you spoke to some near relative whose good you preferred to her gratification. I wince under the pain of condemnation like any other weak structure of flesh and blood; but I love, I honour, I kneel to truth."

Miss Martineau accordingly gave her the truth, first in a letter and then in a review in the *Daily News*. In the letter she said, "I do not like the love, either the kind or the degree of it; and its prevalence in the book, and effect on the action of it, help to explain the passages in the reviews which you consulted me about, and seem to afford some foundation for the criticisms they offered." Charlotte replied indignantly to this letter—"I know what love is as I understand it; and if man or woman should be ashamed of feeling such love, then there is nothing right, faithful, truthful, unselfish on this earth"—and when she read the same strain of criticism in the *Daily News* review she wrote to Miss Wooler, "She has shewn with reference to the work a spirit so strangely and unexpectedly acrimonious that I have gathered courage to tell her that the gulf of mutual difference between her and me is so wide and deep, the bridge of union so slight and uncertain, that I have come to the conclusion that frequent intercourse would be most perilous and unadvisable." In other words—in the terser, more pungent, but lamentably less elegant language of today, "I'm through with the woman." We can almost hear the swish of Charlotte's skirt as she swung away. She had no further intercourse then or thereafter with Miss Martineau; so we may return to Mr. Nicholls.

You may ask, in the fashion of Ellen Nussey, how he was demeaning himself. Here is Charlotte's answer. The parsonage had just had the honour of entertaining for a night the Bishop

of the Diocese, and had invited, as is often done in such a case, the local clergy to meet him. It was impossible for the official curate of Haworth, Mr. Nicholls, not to attend; so he came and sat there amongst the others. "DEAR ELLEN—We had the parsons to supper as well as to tea. Mr. N. demeaned himself not quite pleasantly. I thought he made no effort to struggle with his dejection but gave way to it in a manner to draw notice; the Bishop was obviously puzzled by it. Mr. Nicholls also showed temper once or twice in speaking to Papa. Martha was beginning to tell me of certain 'flaysome' looks also, but I desired not to hear of them. The fact is, I shall be most thankful when he is well away. I pity him, but I don't like that dark gloom of his. He dogged me up the lane after the evening service in no pleasant manner. He stopped also in the passage after the Bishop and the other clergy were gone into the room, and it was because I drew away and went upstairs that he gave that look which filled Martha's soul with horror. She, it seems, meantime, was making it her business to watch him from the kitchen door. If Mr. Nicholls be a good man at bottom, it is a sad thing that nature has not given him the faculty to put goodness into a more attractive form. Into the bargain of all the rest he managed to get up a most pertinacious and needless dispute with the Inspector, in listening to which all my old unfavourable impressions revived so strongly, I fear my countenance could not but shew them."

So now the parsonage, ten steps up the lane, fronted Mr. Nicholls in his lodging like a dour and hostile fortress on its hill. Dislike and repulse looked at him from every window. Charlotte's favour was lost; "Papa has a perfect antipathy to him, and he, I fear, to Papa. Martha hates him. I think he might almost be dying and they would not speak a friendly word to or of him." Only one dweller in that cold stone house came out of the garden wicket and approached with a kind look; and that was Flossy, Anne's little spaniel. Flossy, caring nothing for this present imbroglio, came diagonally across the lane every day and called on Mr. Nicholls; and every day Mr. Nicholls, gloomy, abstracted, and silent, took this friend for a walk.

In the whole of Haworth he had hardly another friend.

"He still goes over to see Mr. Sowden sometimes, and, poor fellow, that is all. . . . I pity him inexpressibly. We never meet nor speak, nor dare I look at him; silent pity is just all that I can give him, and as he knows nothing about that, it does not comfort. He is now grown so gloomy and reserved that nobody seems to like him. His fellow curates shun trouble in that shape; the lower orders dislike it. . . . How much of all this he deserves I can't tell; certainly he never was agreeable or amiable, and is less so now than ever, and alas! I do not know him well enough to be sure that there is truth and true affection or only rancour and corroding disappointment at the bottom of his chagrin. In this state of things I must be and am *entirely passive*." But here, in this week's instalment of the serial story to Ellen, comes a most remarkable sentence. An astonishing sentence after what has gone before. Is it the first light of a new day, pale behind the hill? "I may be losing the purest gem, and to me far the most precious, life can give—genuine attachment—or I may be escaping the yoke of a morose temper."

Unaware of this glimmering light, and finding his position unbearable, Mr. Nicholls resigned again and obtained for himself a curacy in Kirk Smeaton, to which to take his gloom and his memories. He was to leave Haworth after Whit Sunday. And on that festival Sunday in 1853 the old church witnessed a little scene that had assuredly never been paralleled in its long story and has probably seldom been matched in any church in our islands. Mr. Nicholls, the only clergyman in the church, was at the communion table; Charlotte knelt in the vicarage pew beneath the towering pulpit; a congregation was scattered among the high box pews; John Brown was by the door. The May sunlight, I imagine, glanced in through the round-arched windows.

"Yesterday was a strange sort of a day at church. It seems as if I were to be punished for my doubts about the nature and truth of poor Mr. Nicholls' regard. Having ventured on Whit Sunday to stop the sacrament, I got a lesson not to be repeated. He struggled, faltered, then lost command over himself—stood before my eyes and in the sight of all the communicants white, shaking, voiceless. Papa was not there, thank God! Joseph Redman spoke some words to him. He made a

great effort, but could only with difficulty whisper and falter through the service. I suppose he thought this would be the last time; he goes either this week or the next. I heard the women sobbing round, and I could not quite check my own tears."

Either Joseph Redman, whoever he may have been, or John Brown, reported the incident to Mr. Brontë, who promptly designated his curate an "unmanly driveller". We may question which is the more unmanly, to suffer at the loss of the beloved or to sneer at a fellow creature in his pain; but Miss Rosamond Langbridge in her *Charlotte Brontë* shouts her answer too hoarsely: "If nothing else had ever been said against Charlotte Brontë's father, starver of his children's bodies and souls, this one saying was enough; for it is difficult to enter into the mind of any man, so utterly without the rudiments of humanity or 'decency as to comment upon heart-break with such brutal savagery'; and I lift my arm again and look for a weapon. Why, even Emily, the humane, could have let fall such words when she was irritable and not at her best. Mr. Brontë merited a stern reprobation, not for a phrase but for an attitude. In this mood there was no ruth in him nor savour of reconciliation; no lessening of judgment as he recalled his own follies and sins; no enlargement of the heart or access of pity; and I doubt not that he preached in the church that Whitsun evening on the coming of the Holy Spirit among men.

The whole parish was now swinging round to pity for Mr. Nicholls. They got up a subscription to present him with a testimonial after his many years of earnest and unassuming service; and Charlotte "could not help feeling a certain satisfaction" that they were thus honouring him. "Many are expressing both their commiseration and esteem for him. The Churchwardens recently put the question to him plainly: Why was he going? Was it Mr. Brontë's fault or his own? 'His own,' he answered. Did he blame Mr. Brontë? 'No! he did not: if anybody was wrong it was himself.' Was he willing to go? 'No! it gave him great pain.' Yet he is not always right. I must be just. He shows a curious mixture of honour and obstinacy—feeling and sullenness. Papa addressed him at the school tea-drinking, with *constrained* civility, but still with *civility*. He did

not reply civilly; he cut short further words." So might I, I fear, if, after being held in contempt for six months, I was addressed at a public tea-drinking with constrained civility. The parishioners organised a public meeting for their hero and there presented him with a gold watch. Some of the neighbouring clergy attended as a tribute to a faithful fellow-worker; but "Papa was not very well, and I advised him to stay away, which he did." It was not the last presentation to Mr. Nicholls from which, attacked by a slight indisposition, he stayed away; as we shall see.

On the Thursday evening, after Whitsun, Mr. Nicholls called at the parsonage to deliver up the deeds of the National School and to say some sort of good-bye to his Vicar. He looked into the living-room but Charlotte was not there: he saw only the servants cleaning it out and washing the paint; and he turned away and went into the study. Charlotte did not follow him in, for fear lest the final scene between the two men should be constrained and embarrassing; but since she saw much that was happening we can surmise that she was on the landing above, watching and listening. After a time Mr. Nicholls came out of the study and Charlotte, undecided, made no move. He interpreted this as a wish not to see him—as indeed it tended to be (so Charlotte tells us) right up to the last moment. He went from the house and the listening, or watching, Charlotte perceived that "he stayed long before going out at the gate". Acting on an impulse, as she remembered his grief, she "took courage and went out, trembling and miserable". She found him leaning against the garden door in a paroxysm of anguish, sobbing as women never sob. Those are her words; and I think of him always as I pass that gate in the garden wall. "Of course I went straight to him. Very few words were interchanged, those few barely articulate. Several things I should have liked to ask him were swept entirely from my memory." What were those things that she wanted to ask of him? "Poor fellow! But he wanted such hope and encouragement as I could not give him. Still, I trust he must know now that I am not cruelly blind and indifferent to his constancy and grief."

There at this wicket in the lane they parted, he to his lodging a few paces down the cobbled slope, she somewhat slowly into

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the house which, as it is easy to discern in her letters, was now a little emptier than before.

§

"In this state of things I must be, and I am, *entirely passive.*" Not so. That may have been true before Mr. Nicholls left, but now, or very soon after the parting, she became entirely active. His constancy and grief, proofs of that "genuine attachment", which she assessed as the most precious thing in life, were defeating her doubts. In such circumstances, and being Charlotte, she acted promptly and efficiently. "Being once up, I don't mean to sit down till I have got what 'I want'; and what she wanted was assurance. Excellent manageress, skilful ship's pilot, she fetched him back to Haworth in two months and placed him, for the time being, and while she was considering him well and making up her mind, at the Haworth Grammar School under the care of their common friend, Mr. Grant, the headmaster, late of *Shirley*.

The old Haworth Grammar School and Master's House, much altered, can still be seen at about a mile's distance by road from the parsonage, and about two thirds of a mile by the fields. It is a square, unremarkable house standing in the corner of a field with a wall round its garden. From its east wall projects a low outbuilding with a perpendicular gothic east window which gives it the semblance of an oratory or chantry chapel. This one-storey gothic wing was the school-room where for a time Branwell was instructed with other Haworth boys, according to the provisions of its charitable founder, "in the Greek and Latin Classics". It is now a wash-house. The house itself is in private occupation and called "Marshlands".

Even today it stands apart from the enlarged and spreading Haworth, so that a hundred years ago it must have been easy for Mr. Nicholls to lie there as in a fox's earth, away from his late Vicar's eye. Sometimes, when evening emptied the hills and the quarries, he would leave the school house and climb up the fieldpath that led to the church. And Charlotte, a mile away, would slip on her shawl and bonnet and

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steal through the churchyard and across the fields to meet him. Many times I have sauntered along that fieldpath between school house and churchyard—it trundles up and down the hillside, Peniston Hill on your left above the walled pastures, and Cullingworth Moor across the valley bottom; flagstones in the turf for much of the way, then “a little and a lone green lane” between the dry-stone fences—and I have seen, as I walked and mused, the little grey figure of Charlotte, fluttered and guilty but resolute, hurrying by the walls and over the turf, or the slower and rigider form of Mr. Nicholls in his black coat and shovel hat climbing the hill to meet her. And I have thought of their doubts and their hopes; and the happiness, not yet to be believed in, that was breaking upon them. I like to think that they embraced for the first time somewhere here.

Guilty Charlotte certainly felt, for after he had left Haworth and she was writing to him, her conscience tormented her till she had told her father of the correspondence. “I grew very miserable in keeping it from Papa. At last sheer pain made me gather courage to break it. I told all. It was very hard and rough work at the time, but the issue after a few days”—sultry days, one imagines—“was that I obtained leave to continue the communication.” Her motives may have been mixed when she made the revelation, and her conscience aided by a sudden, springing hope, because the new curate, Mr. de Renzi, was proving a disappointment, and Mr. Brontë was comparing his work unfavourably with the driveller who preceded him.

In January, steering her ship skilfully through the shoals and reefs, she brought Mr. Nicholls back to Mr. Grant’s, having stipulated with Papa for “opportunity to become better acquainted.” After ten years’ association in the parish they spent ten days getting better acquainted. Then Mr. Nicholls went away again, better acquainted; and Charlotte declared to Ellen the same result in herself. “I had it (the opportunity) and all I learnt inclined me to esteem and affection.” So does one find what one longs to find. But there was yet some steering to be done with Papa, and the firm hand of Charlotte piloted him, with a nice accuracy, into port. He was “very, very hostile, bitterly unjust”; but she pointed out that if Mr. Nicholls married

her and returned as curate to Haworth he could live in the parsonage and then she would still be there to keep house for them all and watch over her father's health and comfort, and Mr. Nicholls would be there to relieve him of nine-tenths of the parish work; and, moreover, Mr. Nicholls' contribution to the household expenses would "in a pecuniary sense bring him gain instead of loss". At this point a healing light began to play upon Mr. Brontë, and, after musing a while, he showed that a miracle, while not instantaneous, was nearly complete, Ponder Charlotte's very next words. "What seemed at one time impossible is now arranged, and Papa begins really to take a pleasure in the prospect." And this, four days afterwards: "Papa's mind seems wholly changed about the matter, and he has said both to me and when I was not there, how much happier he feels since he allowed all to be settled."

The only problem remaining, now that it was agreed Mr. Nicholls should live in the parsonage, was where to put him. Charlotte put him in the peat-house. This, one regrets in a loose moment to admit, is not as comic as it sounds. The peat-house was a tiny cell behind the living-room with a small, arched window through which Branwell, returning from the "Bull", used sometimes to effect a quiet entrance into the house. We may remember that at one time it was inhabited by Victoria and Adelaide, the geese. Charlotte had it cleaned out and papered; and she stitched green-and-white curtains for the little window. "The little new room is got into order, and the green-and-white curtains are up; they exactly suit the papering, and look neat and clean enough." Meanwhile in the living-room on the other side of the wall there were, one gathers, occasional Jane-and-Rochester scenes between her and her now affianced lover. We read of Mr. Nicholls "hindering" her in her pre-marriage sewing; and we conjecture that he was claiming the rights of a fiancé and that Charlotte was being a little coy about granting them. She begged to be allowed to get on with her sewing. He hindered her, she says, for a full week. Mr. Nicholls was suffering at this time from rheumatism and refraining, with some strength, from dwelling too much upon his pains. Charlotte, while admiring his restraint, pretended to Ellen that she was appalled at the prospect of having two invalids on her

hands; though it is plain that this rheumatism in Mr. Nicholls was making a great appeal to her. 'For unselfish reasons he did so earnestly wish this complaint might not become chronic. I fear, I fear. But, however, I mean to stand by him now, whether in weal or woe. . . . If he is doomed to suffer, it seems that so much the more will he need care and help. And yet the ultimate possibilities of such a case are appalling. You remember your aunt.' One wonders what awful experiences Ellen had undergone with her aunt.

Later, apparently, Mr. Nicholls was less stoical about the rheumatism, and his descriptions terrified Charlotte. "At first I was thoroughly frightened. However, inquiring gradually relieved me. In short I soon discovered that my business was, instead of sympathy, to rate soundly. The patient had wholesome treatment while he was at Haworth, and went away singularly better; perfectly unreasonable, however, on some points, as his fallible sex are not ashamed to be. Man is, indeed, an amazing piece of mechanism when you see, so to speak, the full weakness of what he calls his strength. There is not a female child above the age of eight but might rebuke him for spoilt petulance of his wilful nonsense."

This is clearly love. But there was that in Charlotte's nature which could never believe in her happiness. To Mrs. Gaskell she once said that for such as herself whose lot had been cast by God in a rough road the wisest course was always to moderate expectation and school oneself against ever anticipating any pleasure. And now she reported to Ellen that her happiness was of the soberest order. "I trust to love my husband. I am grateful for his tender love to me. I believe him to be an affectionate, a conscientious, a high-principled man; and if, with all this, I should yield to regrets that fine talents, congenial tastes and thoughts are not added, it seems to me that I should be most presumptuous and thankless." And to Miss Wooler, writing the next day, she conceded that the destiny which Providence in His goodness seemed to offer her would not be generally regarded as brilliant, but she maintained that some germs of real happiness were to be seen in it. In the letter to Ellen she told her that she was to be the only bridesmaid and that she was writing to Miss Wooler who was to be the only

other friend present at the wedding. "There is a strange half-sad feeling in making these announcements. The whole thing is something other than imagination paints it beforehand; cares, fears, come mixed inextricably with hopes."

Twenty-three years before these three women had first met on a cold January day: Charlotte and Miss Wooler on the steps of Roe Head; Charlotte and Ellen, two children then, in its large bow-windowed schoolroom. Roe Head alone, of all the places Charlotte had known, came to the wedding.

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The date of the wedding, June 29th, was kept secret from all except the very few invited to the breakfast; and, further, its time was fixed at eight in the morning before the village would be astir. Only the officiating clergyman, Mr. Sutcliffe Sowden, the single bridesmaid, and Miss Wooler were to be present in the church. Not even Mr. and Mrs. Grant of the Grammar School who had done so much to tend and nourish the courtship, and who were to house the bridegroom and the minister the night before, were asked to the ceremony, but they were bidden to the breakfast in the parsonage. The village, however, had been alert and watching for some time, and when Miss Wooler and Ellen Nussey arrived together in a cab from Keighley, and Mr. Nicholls and Mr. Sowden were seen in the neighbourhood of the schoolhouse, all Haworth on its hill knew that the hour for Miss Brontë was about to chime.

That evening Charlotte showed her two friends, who were staying in the parsonage, the wedding dress of white embroidered muslin, the lace mantle, and the white bonnet trimmed with green leaves which were spread out in readiness for tomorrow. At nine o'clock Mr. Brontë conducted family prayers in his study, and after this had an attack of diplomatic sickness, which compelled him to announce to Charlotte, when she came in to say good night for the last time as his daughter and property, that he wasn't coming to the service in the morning and she must get somebody else to give her away to Mr. Nicholls. It would be charitable to assume that the sickness was real, and that he was

in great pain, but how can one really believe that he who had been up and about all day could not have dragged himself the few yards to the church next morning in his only daughter's most solemn hour? No, the name of the sickness into which he had relapsed so suddenly was not, I fear, dyspepsia or bronchitis but Arthur Bell Nicholls. The same nausea had visited him when they presented that gentleman with a gold watch, and it came upon him with violence now when they were about to present him with Charlotte. It is typical of the times that the three baffled and harassed women, Charlotte and Ellen and Miss Wooler, were amazed to discover, on bending studiously over the Marriage Service in the lamplight of the living-room, at ten o'clock at night, that a woman could be given away by someone other than a man. Charlotte, hoping that it would be all right, but probably not quite sure, promptly asked Miss Wooler to give her to Mr. Nicholls, and Miss Wooler consented to do her this kindness. And so, all relieved but still shaken, to bed.

And next morning at the communion rail in the old, friendly church Mr. Sowden received Charlotte from Miss Wooler and put her hand into Mr. Nicholls' right hand, while Emily and Branwell, her mother, and Maria and Elizabeth slept at her side. These were the only members of her family who were present. The ceremony over, the little company came out into the fresh morning light to find an assembly of the villagers waiting in the lane. The village women, when they saw Charlotte on Mr. Nicholls' arm, in her white embroidered muslin and bonnet trimmed with green leaves, were, as usual, much moved and declared through their tears that she looked like a snowdrop. And Charlotte Nicholls and Arthur Nicholls, with praises and blessings and heartfelt hopes following them, passed before them all into the parsonage.

This marriage of Charlotte on that June morning was a significant and apt crown to her story. Fifteen years before in 1839 the Rev. Henry Nussey, that earnest and humourless young clergyman, had asked her to marry him, and she had gently and laughingly declined. In *Jane Eyre*, in the person of her heroine, she had rejected the offer of that high-minded, intense, God-bound minister, the Rev. St. John Rivers. Between

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that first proposal and her deed this morning she had loved M. Heger with all the massed passion of a Brontë heart, and drowned him in the last pages of *Villette*; she had trespassed on the outskirts of a love for the bright, socially gifted George Smith, her young publisher; she had given an intellectual worship to Thackeray that might, we dare fancy, have raised him to a position only a step or two below M. Heger's; she had received the offer, and weighed the notion of a marriage with the capable, cultivated and forceful James Taylor, of Smith, Elder & Co., but, unable to love him as she longed to love, she had sent him away. And in the end, and in spite of all her experiences and opportunities in the larger world, she married Henry Nussey, only now his name was Arthur Bell Nicholls. After all she married, not Rochester, but St. John Rivers.

If ever a wheel came full circle, it did so on this June morning in 1854. Then Charlotte surrendered, not to the rebel in her, but to the conformer, the puritan, the stern moralist, the daughter of her father. Not without a conflict, not without a backward glance, not without uncertainties that would trouble her always, she gave herself to the parsonage, the home, the family, the life of duty and peace, away from the formidable and intimidating world. It was the triumph of that in her which she had always loved and, as was now shown, loved the best.

CHAPTER TWENTY-SEVEN

AND how much she loved the domestic and dutiful side of her is shown by how happy, unexpectedly happy, she was in the one summer and one winter which were all she was to enjoy of married life. She was very happy. Not completely happy, of course, since no one is that for a summer and winter through, and certainly not a woman in whose breast incompatible desires are at strife; but for nine months she was nearer complete happiness than she had ever been.

Their honeymoon tour was in Ireland. Charlotte went away in a grey gallooned dress with a bodice fastened at the back, a grey Cashmere shawl, and a bonnet of grey drawn silk trimmed with pink roses. Nobody has recorded whether Mr. Nicholls drove away in some light attire or in one of his customary suits of solemn black. They visited Dublin, Tralee, Killarney and Glengariff. At Tralee, on the rock-bound Western coast, Charlotte asked to be left alone as she went forward to the cliff's edge to meet the great Atlantic rollers coming in, rank after rank, and charging the rocks. It was a habit of hers to ask to be left alone with the sea. Mr. Nicholls, however, came hurrying up when he thought her too near the brink—which masculine protectiveness, if we know Charlotte, pleased her exceedingly. At Killarney she must have remembered a certain Modern Tale, *The Maid of Killarney*, in which were interwoven some cursory remarks on Religion and Politics, by the Rev. P. Brontë, A.B.

The last days of the tour they gave to the Bells at Banagher in the very centre of Ireland, in Offaly, then known as King's County. The Rev. Alan Bell, Arthur's uncle, had been his guardian since he was seven years old, and now he welcomed to his home Arthur's bride, the famous Currer Bell, with some badinage, we may be sure, about the name.

After all her doubts, only half concealed, as to whether she had cheapened herself by marrying a poor-paid, untalented and unliterary curate with a walled-in mind, it must have been a surprise to her, and a remedial surprise, to learn that in these

parts, and among his friends, *she* was regarded as the fortunate one. "I must say that I like my new relations. My dear husband too appears in a new light in his own country"—certainly a new light; this view of Arthur had not broken upon her before. "More than once I have had deep pleasure in hearing his praises on all sides. Some of the old servants and followers of the family tell me that I am a most fortunate person; for that I have got one of the best gentlemen in the country. . . . I trust I feel thankful to God for having enabled me to make a right choice; and I pray to be enabled to repay as I ought the affectionate devotion of a truthful, honourable man."

One of the new relatives was Mary Bell, Arthur's cousin. As Charlotte shook hands with her, and perhaps kissed her, she did not know that this would be Arthur's wife, nine years after her own death, and live at his side for forty more years till in the next and distant century he too died.

Charlotte returned to Haworth and the parsonage a different woman from the self-dubbed "old maid", slightly soured, of the foregoing years. Much of her morbidity and her inability to believe in happiness had dropped from her like forgotten rags, now that she was fulfilled as a woman as well as a novelist. Her letters reveal, I think, a satisfaction even deeper than that of which she expressly speaks. "My life is changed indeed: to be wanted continually, to be constantly called for and occupied seems so strange; yet it is a marvellously good thing. As yet I don't quite understand how some wives grow selfish. As far as my experience of matrimony goes, I think it tends to draw you out of, and away from yourself." "My own life is more occupied than it used to be: I have not so much time for thinking: I am obliged to be more practical, for my dear Arthur is a very practical as well as a very punctual and methodical man. Every morning he is in the National School by nine o'clock; he gives the children religious instruction till half past ten. Almost every afternoon he pays visits among the poor parishioners. Of course, he often finds a little work for his wife to do, and I hope she is not sorry to help him." "For my own part, it is long since I have known such comparative immunity from headache, etc., as during the last three months. My life is different from what it used to be. May God make me thankful

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for it. I have a good, kind, attached husband; and every day my own attachment grows stronger." "It is almost inexplicable to me that I seem so often hurried now; but the fact is, whenever Arthur is in I must have occupations in which he can share, or which will at least not divert my attention from him." "He is well, I thank God, and so am I, and he is 'my dear boy', certainly dearer now than he was six months ago. . . . Good-bye, dear Nell." As we read these sentences an echo comes out of the past, out of the far-away Brussels days, "It is natural to me to submit. . . ." And another echo from the years still longer dead, when Maria Branwell was writing to her "dear saucy Pat": "It is pleasant to be subject to those we love."

Arthur was so well content that he was putting on weight and centring all his dismay on this too manifest fact. Charlotte speaks with a creator's pride of the twelve pounds she put on him in Ireland. "To see this improvement in him has been a main source of happiness to me and, to speak truth, a subject of wonder too." Mr. Brontë was, if *he* were to speak truth—but he probably kept a wise silence about some of it—never more tranquil and content; Charlotte was making a great fuss of him and Arthur was doing all his ecclesiastical duty for him. "May God preserve him to us yet for some years! The wish for his continued life, together with a certain solicitude for his happiness and health, seems, I scarcely know why, even stronger in me now than before I was married. Papa has taken no duty since we returned; and each time I see Mr. Nicholls put on gown and surplice, I feel comforted to think that this marriage has secured Papa good aid in his old age."

To mark their gratitude for the welcome and goodwill which the parishioners showed Mr. Nicholls on his return to the curacy he and Charlotte gave a tea-and-supper party to five hundred of them—Sunday School teachers, pupils, bell-ringers, choristers and others—in the schoolroom over the lane. "They seemed to enjoy it very much, and it was very pleasant to see their happiness. One of the villagers, in proposing my husband's health, described him as a '*consistent Christian and a kind gentleman*'. I own the words touched me deeply, and I thought . . . that to merit and win such a character was better than to

earn either wealth or fame or power." Yes; yes certainly; but in idle and musing moments I have often wondered whether John Brown, the bell-ringers, and others, with their Yorkshire humour, inquired of each other as they left the party whether Mr. Nicholls had any thoughts of giving them back that gold watch.

In the same schoolroom, every Sunday morning, Charlotte taught in the Sunday School. In the first year of this century Mr. Whiteley Turner, as you may read in his *Springtime Saunter*, received from the lips of one of Charlotte's scholars, then seventy years old, a picture of Charlotte taking Sunday School. The old lady declared that she could see her teacher now, dressed very plainly but very neatly, her small feet encased in hailstone pattern cloth boots with square toes. She would come noiselessly into the schoolroom, place her muff at the end of a form, adjust her gold glasses which dangled on a delicate gold chain, and stand facing the scholars as they in turn read verses of scripture. She was always "very sharp-spoken" and "strict to a degree". (And this was the rebel creator of *Jane Eyre* and *Villette*!) Mr. Nicholls was the superintendent of the Sunday School, but all that the old lady could say of him was that he was "very punctual".

These scenes, the tea-drinking of the five hundred, and the school on Sunday morning I recreated for myself one evening in that empty and dusty schoolroom which had been kindly opened for me by the successor of John Brown. There was one ancient bench in it that belonged to Charlotte's time, and I wondered how often she had laid her muff upon it. The whole place was very quiet and rather desolate behind its plain-pointed, Gothic windows, for they have built a much larger school now where John Brown's stone-cutting yard used to be.

Charlotte wrote but seldom now. Was this because she had less need of compensation and escape? She made several beginnings of a new novel, but only one of them reached the fiftieth page. A chance came to Mr. Nicholls to take the living of Padiham in Lancashire, which was worth much more than the curacy of Haworth, but neither he nor Charlotte would desert the old man, her father. Arthur Bell Nicholls may have had

many limitations, but his distance from the Kingdom of Heaven was a little less, and his vision of its white towers a little clearer, than his Vicar and master's.

Well, they were thus happy together, Charlotte and Arthur—and then, on a fair but treacherous November day, in an expression of that good fellowship, they took their walk together to the waterfall. And in this ripe fruit of happiness the worm lay hidden. It poisoned Charlotte as she ate of the pith. She had been five months married; she was pregnant, though as yet they were not certain of this; and all her life she had been as brittle in body as she was firm of will. "I intended to have written a line yesterday, but just as I was sitting down for the purpose, Arthur called to me to take a walk. We set off, not intending to go far; but, though wild and cloudy, it was fair in the morning; when we had got about half a mile on the moors, Arthur suggested the idea of the waterfall; after the melted snow, he said, it would be fine. I had often wished to see it in its winter power—so we walked on. It was fine indeed; a perfect torrent racing over the rocks, white and beautiful! It began to rain while we were watching it, and we returned home under a streaming sky. However, I enjoyed the walk inexpressibly, and would not have missed the spectacle on any account."

Shivering attacked her on her return home; a cold and sore throat followed and lingered, and she became a little thin and weak. But such things had come upon her every winter of her life; and, little heeding them, she went in January on a visit to the Kay-Shuttleworths at Gawthorpe. Here the stubborn cold was increased by a walk in thin shoes over damp ground. And a day or two later, when they were back in the parsonage, the alarm was really sounded. "My health has been really very good since my return from Ireland till about ten days ago, when the stomach seemed quite suddenly to lose its tone; indigestion and continual faint sickness have been my portion ever since. Don't conjecture, dear Nell, for it is too soon yet, though I certainly never before felt as I have done lately. . . . Dear Ellen, I want to see you. . . ."

She never did see Ellen again.

A doctor was summoned, and he confirmed the pregnancy.

He encouraged her with the assurance that her sickness was normal, and Charlotte tried to be cheerful, but it was hard, so profound, so strange, was her weakness. Years afterwards Tabitha Brown, Martha's sister, told Mrs. Chadwick, the best informed of all the Brontë biographers, that she saw Miss Brontë in her bed at this time and that the poor lady was so worn and thin that the light showed through her hand when it was lifted up, and her face was so drawn that it was like the face of a little old woman. Her father came into the room when Tabitha Brown was there, and immediately Charlotte, trying as always to protect her family from hurt, said: "See, Papa: I'm a little better. Don't you think I look better?" Martha Brown in these same days sought to strengthen her mistress, after the simple fashion of her kind, with talk of the "little one" that was coming. But Charlotte only smiled weakly and said, "I daresay I shall be glad some day; but I'm so tired."

So tired that, unlike Emily and unlike Anne, she kept to her bed and lay there day after day. It was the bed in the large front room where her mother and her aunt had died; and she could lie there and look out at the church tower, and Haworth huddled below, and the sweeping moors behind. She could dream over the events of her life, the bitter and the sweet, the heavy days of failure and the happy moments of triumph, just as, thirty-four years before, Maria, her mother, had done. Charlotte was in her thirty-ninth year as her mother had been when she lay here in the four-poster bed and dreamed of Penzance with its warm airs, Woodhouse Grove by the Calverley Woods, and Thornton, where she and Pat had been so happy, and where all the children had been small together.

In February old Tabby Ackroyd, after thirty years' work at the parsonage, grew very ill, and Martha, having her mistress to nurse, sent her to the home of the old lady's relatives in Sun Street, lower down the hill. There Tabby died, and they buried her in the churchyard under the garden wall of the parsonage, just by the Gate of the Dead.

The same day that Tabby died—I suppose it was only a coincidence, for Tabby was an old woman of eighty-four and Charlotte was not yet forty—Charlotte, in the presence of her father and Martha Brown, made her will.

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In the name of God Amen. I, CHARLOTTE NICHOLLS, of Haworth in the parish of Bradford and county of York, being of sound and disposing mind, memory, and understanding, but mindful of my own mortality, do this seventeenth day of February, in the year of our Lord one thousand eight hundred and fifty-five, make this my last Will and Testament in manner and form following, that is to say: In case I die without issue I give and bequeath to my husband all my property to be his absolutely and entirely, but, in case I leave issue I bequeath to my husband the interest of my property during his lifetime, and at his death I desire that the principal should go to my surviving child or children; should there be more than one child, share and share alike. And I do hereby make and appoint my said husband, Arthur Bell Nicholls, clerk, sole executor of this my last Will and Testament; In witness whereof I have to this my last Will and Testament subscribed my hand, the day and year first above written—CHARLOTTE NICHOLLS. Signed and acknowledged by the said testatrix CHARLOTTE NICHOLLS, as and for her last Will and Testament in the presence of us, who, at her request, in her presence, and in presence of each other, have at the same time hereunto subscribed our names as witnesses thereto: Patrick Brontë, B.A., Incumbent of Haworth, Yorkshire; Martha Brown.

“Should there be more than one child.” Was she hoping still to live a long time, or was she wondering whether there were two children in her womb? Hope, if there, was not strong enough to lift her up; and she grew slowly but steadily weaker. February became March, and all that month she was gradually sinking. One day, in pencil, she wrote to Ellen. “I must write one line out of my dreary bed. The news of M——’s probable recovery came like a ray of joy to me. I am not going to talk of my sufferings—it would be useless and painful. I want to give you an assurance, which I know will comfort you—and that is that I find in my husband the tenderest nurse, the kindest support, the best earthly comfort that ever woman had. His patience never fails, and it is tried by sad days and broken nights. . . . May God comfort and help you! C. B. NICHOLLS.” She wrote also, and probably before this, for the letter is dated, “Feb. 15th”, to one who had been with her at the Heger

pensionnat, Laetitia Wheelwright; but the hand that held the pencil on this occasion was so weak that her writing has almost gone from the page. "My husband and I live at home with my father; of course I could not leave *him*. He is pretty well, better than last summer. No kinder, better husband than mine, it seems to me, there can be in the world. I do not want now for kind companionship in health and the tenderest nursing in sickness. . . . I cannot write more now; for I am much reduced and very weak. God bless you all."

Mrs. Gaskell held that this was the last letter she ever wrote; but I wonder. The letters to Ellen are undated, and after February 15th she still had six weeks to live. Moreover there is another letter, not quoted in the biographies. One evening last year, when the door of the parsonage was locked, and I was studying and meditating in privacy, in Mr. Nicholl's tiny room, once the peat-house, the custodian of the museum, Mr. Gilliam Mitchell, who had never once failed to help me, unlocked at my request a cupboard against the wall and drew from it a pencilled letter of Charlotte's, carefully preserved between covers. Just on a hundred years had passed since Charlotte on her bed in a room upstairs wrote it to Amelia Taylor, the wife of Joe Taylor, Mary's brother. I hardly dared to handle it. Nor at first would my imagination, defeated by the frail and faded thing, do for me the office I asked of it. The custodian went from the room and left me alone with it, as Charlotte with the sea. And gradually the hundred years fell away.

"DEAR AMELIA—Let me speak the plain truth—my sufferings are very great—my nights indescribable—sickness with scarce a reprieve—I strain till what I vomit is mixed with blood. Medicine I have quite discontinued. If you can send me anything that will do good—*do*. As to my husband, my heart is knit to him—he is so tender, so good, helpful, patient. Poor Joe! long has he to suffer. May God send him, you, all of us, health, strength—comfort. C. B. NICHOLLS."

We bend our heads before a mystery. That which has been, and was good—a small but strong flame from the fire of God—is ceasing to be. The unconquerable spirit of Charlotte is succumbing. It can only cry now for help from anywhere. A great heart can fight no more.

Like Anne she did not want to die. One day, when March was nearly through, she woke from a stupor and discerned the face of her husband by the bedside. Dimly, as from a great way off, she heard a voice praying that she might live. And she whispered to him, for she could hardly speak: "Oh, I am not going to die, am I? He will not separate us; we have been so happy."

As far as we know the last words spoken by Charlotte Brontë were "so happy".

Early on the Saturday of Holy Week in that year, 1855, she died, her father, her husband, and Martha Brown standing by. When old Mr. Brontë, seventy-eight now, saw that she was dead he went quickly from the room without a word, so that Martha wondered at his fortitude or his absence of feeling. But a little later one of her sisters opened the door of another room and saw him kneeling by the bed. He was moaning: "My poor Charlotte. My poor Charlotte."

When they carried her through the gate, and past Tabby's new-made grave in the churchyard, to the vault beneath the church pavement, she was followed, unlike the others who had gone before her to this tryst, Emily and Branwell, her mother and two little sisters, by a train of many people. In Haworth, Mrs. Chadwick tells us, there was in those days, and for long afterwards, a custom of "bidding" to a funeral. An equal number of householders on each side of the home where the death had occurred was called to the burying. To Charlotte's funeral a member of almost every family in Haworth was so bidden; and many of the unbidden, we may be certain, came too. But the great of the world were not there. It was the daughter of the parsonage, "the vicar's Charlotte", not the novelist known far and wide, whom they laid that day out of the sight of men, and among the other children they had known. The great came after; one by one, or in small groups; and the procession of honour continues to this day. The first of them, heading the procession—and this was very seemly—was a great critic and teacher of the time, Matthew Arnold. That month, April 1855, he composed his *Haworth Churchyard*.

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How shall we honour the young,
The ardent, the gifted? how mourn?
Console we cannot; her ear
Is deaf. Far northward from here,
In a churchyard high mid the moors
Of Yorkshire, a little earth
Stops it for ever to praise.

Where, behind Keighley, the road
Up to the heart of the moors
Between heath-clad showery hills
Runs, and colliers' carts
Poach the deep ways coming down,
And a rough, grim'd race have their homes—
There, on its slope, is built
The moorland town. But the church
Stands on the crest of the hill,
Lonely and bleak; at its side
The parsonage-house and the graves.

• • •
And not friendless, nor yet
Only with strangers to meet,
Faces ungreeting and cold,
Thou, O Mourn'd One, to-day
Enterest the House of the Grave.
Those of thy blood, whom thou lov'dst,
Have preceded thee; young,
Loving, a sisterly band:
Some in gift, some in art
Inferior; all in fame.
They, like friends, shall receive
This comer, greet her with joy;
Welcome the Sister, the Friend;
Hear with delight of thy fame.

• • •
Sleep, O cluster of friends,
Sleep! or only, when May,
Brought by the West Wind, returns
Back to your native heaths,
And the plover is heard on the moors,
Yearly awake, to behold

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The opening summer, the sky,
The shining moorland; to hear
The drowsy bee, as of old,
Hum o'er the thyme, the grouse
Call from the heather in bloom:

Sleep; or only for this
Break your united repose

AFTERMATH

ALL that there is of tragedy in this story is now told: over what remains, six quiet years, the Spirit of Comedy takes a mischievous command. For six years Mr. Brontë and Mr. Nicholls, those two old enemies, lived together in the quiet parsonage, with Martha Brown for their housekeeper. These two who for a time had refused to speak to each other or even, if it could be avoided, meet each other, now dwelt together in such mutual affection and regard that when Mr. Brontë drew up his will, some three months after Charlotte's death, he wrote in it, "To my beloved and esteemed son-in-law, the Rev. Arthur Bell Nicholls, B.A., I leave and bequeath the residue of my personal estate of every description which I shall be possessed of at my death for his own absolute benefit." The two invalids whom Charlotte had so feared to have on her hands together lived the one to his eighty-fifth year, the other to his ninetieth. But now it wanted only six years before Mr. Brontë's eighty-four years were done; there was half a century to pass before, in 1906, Mr. Nicholls died.

As the news of Currer Bell's death ran around the world rumours and gossip about the "author of *Jane Eyre*" and the three mysterious Bells sprang up in its path, and some of the whispers, and some of the surmises in the papers, had a tint of scandal. Ellen Nussey, in a letter dated June 6th, 1855, drew Mr. Nicholls' attention to an offensive article entitled *A Few Words about JANE EYRE*, and suggested that Mrs. Gaskell should undertake a reply and give a sound castigation to the writer. "Her personal acquaintance with Haworth, the Parsonage and its inmates, fits her for the task, and if on other subjects she lacked information I would gladly supply her with facts to set aside much that is asserted. . . . Will you ask Mrs. Gaskell to undertake this just and honourable defence? I think she would do it gladly."

Thus it was Ellen Nussey who was the First Cause in that train of events which produced Mrs. Gaskell's *Life* and all that has happened since to the Brontë legend.

Mr. Brontë was soon enthusiastic about a still larger idea, namely that Mrs. Gaskell should write a memoir of Charlotte; Mr. Nicholls viewed this suggestion with apprehension and dislike. The father who had produced Charlotte was as eager to advance her fame as the man who had only married her was averse from publicity. In the end Mr. Nicholls yielded to his father-in-law's "impetuous wish": and on the 16th June, 1855, Mr. Brontë wrote the following letter to Mrs. Gaskell. Like so much else, we owe this fascinating document to Mr. Clement Shorter, who published it, nearly fifty years after it was written, in his *Introduction to the Haworth edition of Mrs. Gaskell's Life*.

"**MY DEAR MADAM**—Finding that a great many scribblers, as well as some clever and truthful writers, have published articles in newspapers and tracts respecting my dear daughter Charlotte since her death, and seeing that many things that have been stated are untrue, but more false"—the old man's brain is not working with perfect precision—"and having reason to think that some may venture to write her life who will be ill-qualified for the undertaking, I can see no better plan under the circumstances than to apply to some established author to write a brief account of her life and to make some remarks on her works. You would seem to me to be the best qualified for doing what I wish should be done. If, therefore, you will be so kind as to publish a long or short account of her life and works, just as you may deem expedient and proper, Mr. Nicholls and I will give you such information as you may require. I should expect and request that you would affix your name so that the work might obtain a wide circulation and be handed down to the latest times. Whatever profits might arise from the sale would, of course, belong to you. You are the first to whom I have applied. Mr. Nicholls approves of the step I have taken, and could my daughter speak from the tomb I feel certain she would laud our choice. . . ."

In this wise he handed to Mrs. Gaskell the rope with which she hanged him.

She went about her task with a splendid verve and vigour. She visited almost every place in which Charlotte had set foot, and interviewed almost everybody of importance, and

many of small importance, to whom she had spoken. She picked up facts, she picked up gossip, and put both alike into her bag. And when this fine collection was amassed, some of it very meaty fragments, she got down to work. Her motto in the composing of the book was clearly *De mortua nil nisi bonum*; it is equally clear that *de vivis*, concerning the living, the same consideration did not apply, and made little appeal to her. She was loyally discreet, far too discreet, about the dead Charlotte; and quite bewilderingly indiscreet about the still living. The book appeared in 1857 and at once the Row was in being: the hornets—her own word—were about her ears. One can almost see the poor lady with her hands over her head to ward off the stings and the threatening buzz from her swarming assailants. When at last she was able to lift her head without fear she declared that she was finished with biography for ever.

Mr. Brontë at first was as delighted with the book as a student with a high diploma or a schoolboy with his First XI colours. He abounded with praise. He said it had given him more satisfaction than anything else in many years past. He affirmed that Mrs. Gaskell's picture of his family was "full of truth and life" and that her portrait of his "brilliant and unhappy son" was a masterpiece. But that was after Mr. Nicholls had read it to him with judicious cuts by the way. Mr. Nicholls must have read it to the half-blind old man with many 'hems and hesitations and halts, as he decided on a compassionate excision.

There were other people, however, to speak with Mr. Brontë in the street and elsewhere about the parts which Mr. Nicholls had omitted, and when he learned—he who had no doubt expected to figure with some distinction and even beauty in the tale—that Mrs. Gaskell had accused him of firing pistols out of the back door to vent a volcanic fury, of burning the hearth-rug in a passion, of half starving the children by denying them meat, of cutting up his wife's silk dress and sawing off the backs of chairs, his wrath was as loud as his disappointment was profound. He had authorised Mrs. Gaskell to write a life of his daughter, not to 'criticise *him*'. It was not thus that he hoped to be "handed down to the latest times". The

poor old man pronounced each of these statements a lie, and all those who had been his servants supported him. "Until I read her Life of Charlotte I did not know," he said, "that I had an enemy in the world. Mrs. Gaskell has made us all as bad as she possibly could."

Mr. Nicholls, in his quieter way, was angry too, not caring at all for the outline of his features which Mrs. Gaskell had sketched. Nancy and Sarah Gars sipped from an acid cup when they read her reference to "wasteful young servants" in the parsonage. The Haworthers, and indeed the whole of the West Riding of Yorkshire, were indignant that a Lancashire lady, and one from Manchester of all places, should come across the border and write them down as a wild, rough, uncouth population whose sour rudeness amounted to positive insult. The White Rose of Yorkshire bridled like a queen in a ruff. "Some of the West Ridingers are very angry," wrote Ellen Nussey, "and declare they are half a century in civilisation before some of the Lancashire folk, and that this neighbourhood is a paradise compared with some districts not far from Manchester." There was trouble about a Haworth girl to whom the authoress had attached the word "seduced". Mr. Carus Wilson and his friends rose like an army with swords unsheathed, and threatened action because Mrs. Gaskell had strenuously maintained that the Lowood of *Jane Eyre* was a fair picture of Cowan Bridge School. Worst of all was the threat from Mrs. Robinson of Thorp Green, now Lady Scott, to whom, with a wildness as unpardonable as the rhetoric in which it was couched, Mrs. Gaskell had attributed the fall of Branwell. "Let her live and repent." It was Mrs. Gaskell who had to repent. As we saw, she was forced to make a public apology in the columns of *The Times*.

In the early summer of 1861 Mr. Brontë preached the sermon that proved to be his last. He went up into the high old pulpit, and stood there, a white-haired and half-blind old man of eighty-four. Beneath him the vicarage pew was empty. But all his family except Anne were there, in the vault at the south corner of the communion rails. And he gave out his text. By a curious fitness, such as has descended on more than one episode in this tale, he announced, "Ecclesiastes, the twelfth chapter and the

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thirteenth verse. 'Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God, and keep his commandments: for this is the whole duty of man.' "

He died on the 7th June in that year, and they opened the Gate of the Dead for the last time to carry him through to his family. A special authority from the Secretary of State was secured to enable him to lie down with his wife and children, the church and churchyard having been closed to burials some time before. Haworth was very still and silent the day he was buried; all the shops closed, all business suspended. The little town filled with mourners, and a multitude waited in the churchyard to see the minister who had served them for forty-one years carried from the parsonage house to the church and the open vault. Six clergy bore the long, heavy coffin: the Incumbents of Cullingworth, Oakworth, Oxenhope, Morton, Ingrow and Hebden Bridge. Before it went the Rev. Dr. Burnet, vicar of Bradford and patron of Haworth, and the Rev. Dr. Cartman, of Skipton. Behind it, as principal mourners, came Mr. Nicholls, Martha Brown and her family, and Mrs. Wainwright, who had been Nancy Garris. The multitude fell in behind the principal mourners and swept into the church, filling every one of the high oak pews and standing in the aisles. "Many shed tears," reported the *Bradford Review* in its next issue, "during the impressive reading of the service for the burial of the dead, by the vicar. The body was laid within the altar rails, by the side of his daughter Charlotte." As the grave closed, the last burial in Haworth church and churchyard was over, and the record of the centuries complete. The closing of the Rev. Patrick Brontë's tomb was the closing of a book.

After the last of the Brontës had gone through the gate it was closed too—and with it our tale. They bricked it up, as you may see, if you go and stand by old Tabby's grave on the churchyard side of the wall.

Quoting I know not whom, Mr. Horsfall Turner, in his *Haworth—Past and Present*, published in 1879, wrote: "Mr. Nicholls would fain have had the living of Haworth, for which he had served so faithful an apprenticeship, and the people would fain have had him to minister over them; it was indeed promised to him by Dr. Burnet, the vicar of Bradford, but local

influences were brought to bear upon the reverend patron, and the people got a Mr. Wade from Bradford instead." It was this Mr. Wade who in 1879 destroyed the church, and thus in his own way ended a story. He promised that the graves of the Brontës should be left undisturbed beneath the pavement of the new church that should arise.

Mr. Nicholls, having seen the list of the Brontës through the gate, and having sustained this disappointment, decided to retire from Holy Orders and establish himself, with the money inherited from Charlotte and Mr. Brontë, as a gentleman farmer in his native Ireland. All the possessions of the Brontës which he did not need he put up for sale. A discoloured and dimming newspaper advertisement states, "Mr. Cragg has the honour to announce that he has received instructions to SELL BY AUCTION on Tuesday, 1st October, 1861, at the Parsonage, Haworth, the valuable household furniture of the late Rev. Patrick Brontë, B.A." And the lots listed in the advertisement include a "mahogany dining table"—round which the sisters used to write their books; a "birch rocking-chair"—in which Tabby used to rest at the end of the day and tell them her tales; a "mahogany rocking-chair"—on which Ellen Nussey used to swing as she stitched and chatted or plaited her hair; a "clock in oak case"—which Mr. Brontë used to wind up on the half-landing as he mounted the stairs to bed; and a "mahogany sofa in Hair"—on which Emily died.

With all else that belonged to the Brontës, Mr. Nicholls went out through the wicket, against which he had once leaned and wept, and returned to that Ireland from which, in the loins of their father, the Brontës had come. And Haworth continued in its avocations and habits, the same now as before these people came; though the little town itself was faintly transfigured, and is still, by the light of this visitation. Until you go to Haworth, you think of it as a little village dreaming on its hillside of the past and the Brontës; go there and you will find it a prosperous and rather merry little town, flourishing in the business of today and only now and again casting its mind back to the fame-making events of a hundred years ago. Perhaps it is a symbol that all the days I lingered there, dwelling in a house over against the parsonage, one face

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of the church clock stood at twelve midnight, or twelve noon, no matter what the other faces were doing or what hour their chimes were striking—and they were telling the time of day with a tolerable accuracy. It was as if Time in Haworth for the most part were flowing on and keeping pace with the centuries, but a little of it, only a small portion of it, were arrested, and lingered as the captive of the years between 1820 and 1861, when the Brontës were the family in the parson's house on the hill.

THE END

APPENDIX I

CHARLOTTE BRONTË IDENTIFIED ON A PHOTOGRAPH

The following note was published in the *Brontë Society Transactions*, 1951: "Charlotte Brontë Identified on a Photograph. Readers who are familiar with the photograph of Haworth Parsonage in the Brontës time, which is among the post-cards sold at the Museum, will be keenly interested in some particulars about it which have reached Mr. Ernest Raymond, author of *In the Steps of the Brontës*. Mr. Raymond reproduced the photograph in this book, and it has brought him a letter from Mrs. Edith Farrar, of St. John's, Wilton, near Salisbury, which we are permitted to publish in the Transactions. Mrs. Farrar writes:

'I was born in Haworth, 82 years ago, within a stone's-throw of the Parsonage. My father, Edwin Feather, although a younger man than the Rev. Patrick Brontë, was a close friend of his, and the latter was a frequent visitor to our home, and he would often (after taking his customary tot of whisky) quote the following: "It is not what goeth in but what cometh out that defileth man."

'My father was the postman you refer to in your book as delivering the letter to Charlotte from Smith and Elder, offering to buy *Jane Eyre* for £500. He also despatched the famous manuscripts. . . . Charlotte was my mother's Sunday School teacher, and years afterwards in that same school house I served for years as a teacher, employed by the Rev. John Wade at the magnificent salary of £5 per annum. . . . My father was the only man who was allowed to photograph the church's interior and also the Brontë family, and he also took the photograph reproduced in your book (*facing page 48*). I doubt if many are aware that the figure with back to camera was John Brown, the sexton, and the small figure passing the side of the house was Charlotte.'

APPENDIX II

SOME UNREPORTED BRONTË RELICS

It was early evident, from the nature of the writing alone, that Dr. William Wright's book, *The Brontës in Ireland*, was an uncritical and unscholarly work. It deserved most of the ruthless criticism directed upon it in 1897, in the book *The Brontës, Fact and Fiction*, by Angus MacKay, whose mind was as clear and keen as Dr. Wright's was blunted by his desire to believe romantic things. None the less even the ruthless MacKay allowed that the material provided by the Rev. J. B. Lusk, Presbyterian Minister of Glasgar, Ireland, was trustworthy; and Mr. Lusk himself was inclined to believe that other parts of Dr. Wright's book were worthy of more respect than Mr. MacKay would give them. I am quite unqualified to judge between the disputants, but I am certain after reading a large number of unpublished manuscripts left by Mr. Lusk that he was a capable and careful Brontë student. And I have to report that in the collection of Brontëana bequeathed by him to his wife and daughter there are the following deeply interesting relics, whose existence, so far as I have been able to trace, has never been published to the world. They have lain in the keeping of Mrs. Lusk and Mrs. Eric Humphries, the daughter, ever since Mr. Lusk died, and these ladies most kindly permit me to describe them here.

First there is a school prize, in full calf, but no bigger than a prayer book, presented to Ellen Nussey with the following inscription in Miss Wooler's exquisite hand:

*For Good and Ladylike conduct, adjudged to Miss
Nussey, and presented with the Miss Woolers kind love.
Roe Head.*

June 21st —32.

As Charlotte was at Roe Head in June 1832, and went to stay with Ellen that summer, we can be certain that she handled this book. I give its *Contents* because they seem to me to show something of the mental atmosphere of Roe Head which left a lasting impress on Charlotte and stifled Emily.

Letters on the Improvement of the Mind, By Mrs. Chapone.

- I. *On the first Principles of Religion.*
- II. *On the Study of the Holy Scriptures.*

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- III. *The same subject continued.*
- IV. *On the Regulation of the Heart and Affections.*
- V. *The same subject continued.*
- VI. *On the Government of the Temper.*
- VII. *On Economy.*
- VIII. *On Politeness and Accomplishment.*
- IX. *On Geography and Chronology.*
- X. *On reading History.*

A Father's Legacy to His Daughter, By Dr. Gregory.
Preface—Introduction—Religion—Conduct and Behaviour—Amusements—Friendship, Love, and Marriage.
A Mother's Advice to her Absent Daughters, By Lady Pennington.
Reflections on the Seven Days of the Week, By Catherine Talbot.

Edinburgh: John Anderson, Jun., 55, North Bridge-Street, and Thomas Tegg, London, 1824.

Next there is the actual Will of the Rev. Patrick Brontë's fourth brother, Welsh Brontë, who died in 1868. It appears to be written in the hand of a lawyer's clerk, and I give it exactly as it stands because it offers a fascinating glimpse of the Irish Brontës. It will be noticed that the clerk writes the name 'Bruntie', and Welsh, in 1865, signs himself 'Brontë'.

I Welsh Bruntie of Ballynaskeagh in the County of Down farmer being weak in body but of sound mind and memory do make this my last Will and Testament in form and manner folowing. And first I Will and bequeath to my Three Sisters Mary and Rosan and Eleanor to have and to hold my farm with the use of my Cow for the space of Three years after my death next I Will and bequeath my farm and houses and chattels after the expiration of the three years mentioned above to my son Curnelous Bruntie and he is neither to sell nor morguage during the Lease. I next Will and bequeath to my daughter Margaret Shennan the sum of Sixteen bound to be paid to her by my son when he comes into possession of my farm and said money is to be paid at four payments that is four pound each year for four years Next I Will and bequeath to my Grandson Thomas Shennan my silver Watch and next I nominate and appoint Christopher Radcliff junior of Lisnacreeney to be the executor of this my last Will and Testament and in tesimony of this being my last Will and Testament I have set my hand and seal in presence of the two witnesses who have

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subscribed there names dated this 15th day of June Eighteen hundred and Sixty Five 1865.

(Signed) Welsh Brontë. (Seal)

John McKinstry.

Samuel McNeill.

Then there is a copy of *Shirley* dated 1857 with an inscription on the title page, *A small token of remembrance to the Brontë family from Louise Michaud, Brighton the 26 of February, 1858*, and, scribbled on other pages, the names *Welsh Brontë*, *Cornelius Brontë*, *Ballynaskeagh*, and *Alice Brontë*.

Other small but interesting pieces are a French Grammar, dated 1763 and bearing the signatures *Hugh Brontë, June 17th 1814*, *Cornelius Brontë of Ballynaskeagh His Book year 1830*, and *Welsh Brontë, February—1884*; and a torn title page of a New Testament with these dates and names written upon it:

1806 Welch Bruntty.

(*Here some indecipherable writing.*)

J.B. Born 1783.

W.B. Born 1786.

S.J.B. (*indecipherable*).

The three sets of initials obviously refer to the Rev. Patrick Brontë's two brothers and sister, James Brontë, Welch Brontë and Sarah. The birth dates coincide with their baptism dates.

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